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No. 754.] Week ending June 13th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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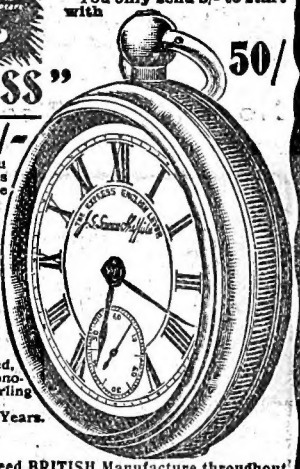

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SHORT STORIES

No. 754.] Week Ending June 13th, 1903. [One Penny.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life.

By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

PROLOGUE.

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." The sacred words were droned in monotonous tones by a lean, apathetic curate. The church is empty save for the two principals—Margaret Heath and Vernon Grant—and the necessary witnesses. After the ceremony, the bride and bridegroom leave for Paris.

Digby Scarlett turns over his letters leisurely in the interim between breakfast and sorting a cigar.

"Ah, here's one from my friend and collaborator, the valiant Vernon. I wonder what the Paris postmark means? Any way, it can wait until I have written to ask the adorable Margaret Heath to be my wife."

This done, he opens Vernon's letter, and when he reads the news of the latter's marriage to the girl to whom he has just penned a proposal, he murmurs—

"Twice hit by the same hand, and both blows destined to die with me—to bleed internally. Not bad for a man intellectually my inferior! But the third blow *I* shall get in. My innings begins to-day." Then he leaves for Paris to join the happy couple at their invitation.

Scarlett and Grant at one time had practised copying each other's signatures, and Grant had been very successful in his imitations of that of his friend. Now Scarlett persuades him, for a bet, to sign his name to a cheque for a large amount, promising to make it all right at the bank when presented. This, however, he fails to do, and Grant is arrested and sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude for forgery, Scarlett not even saying a word in his defence. Mrs. Grant goes to the prison to bid her husband farewell, and tells him that she will never have anything more to do with him.

The First Chapters.

It is the birthday of Lady Maitland, the young second wife of Sir Trevor Maitland, of Maitland Manor. As a birthday gift her husband says that he has decided to give her a daughter—at present she has an only son, Woolf—by adopting a girl, Ivy Strange, who had been discovered in the grounds some fourteen years before, and brought up with Muriel, the baronet's younger daughter. Jack Maitland, Sir Trevor's elder son, is in love with Ivy.

Lady Maitland resents the adoption of Ivy for fear that thereby her son will be cheated out of his inheritance.

Heriot North, an old friend of the family, arrives on a visit to the Manor, to pay his attentions to Agnes, Sir Trevor's elder daughter. He succumbs, however, to Lady Maitland's charms and neglects Agnes, which makes the latter much incensed against her stepmother.

One evening, when Lady Maitland retires to her room to dress for dinner, she finds there a man—Mike Holland, a burglar. He is gazing at a locket in which are the photographs of herself and a man. Holland says he knew the man (Lady Maitland's first husband) in prison, and threatens to expose her unless she pays him to keep silence. She accepts his terms. A letter is delivered to Lady Maitland by her maid, Mason, in response to which she meets Mike Holland in the wood at dead of night. He again threatens her, but she says she knows that her first husband is dead.

"Even if he is," growls the man, "Sir Trevor don't know that you was the wife of a convict; that might interest 'im, anyway, and you 'ardly wish that little fact to be known to 'im!"

"It does not matter in the least now, if he did know it," she answers coolly; "he would do nothing for the sake of his name and our boy's! I am quite safe! But," she adds, "I am prepared to send you twenty pounds when I hear that you have left Melton for London—anywhere—not before. Now, say whether you will accept my offer—it will not be repeated!"

He hesitates, and his cruel fingers itch to be at the soft, white neck gleaming in the moonlight; but twenty pounds is twenty pounds!

"'Ow shall I let you know I am in London?"

"A telegram with the words 'dress ready to send,' will be enough," she answers briefly. "I will send the money by a friend to the District Messenger Office in Regent Street for you to call for. I shall run no risks; the money will be in gold."

As the gloom hides her from sight, the baffled man sends an oath, strong and venomous, after her.

"Yes, my fine madam, you've scored again, but I'll get my own back one day! To think that after 'anging on all these years, my old pard should kick the bucket just when 'is life 'ad got so valuable!"

Jack Maitland goes down to the lodge at the park gates to see the lodge-keeper's wife, Mrs. Parkins, and ask her if she has any of the clothes in which Ivy Strange was found, as the latter has said she will not marry him until the mystery of her birth is cleared up. Mrs. Parkins promises to look, and then she suddenly recollects something. When brushing Ivy's hair one night she noticed a mark, hidden under her curls—the mark of a broad arrow!

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Face on the Balcony.

AFTER his first sensation of horror at hearing of the sinister birthmark on his dainty love's white brow, Jack pulled himself together. On second thoughts it was not so very frightful, and could mean nothing more than an ordinary coincidence; for between the innocent life of Ivy and the shadow of shame there yawned a very wide chasm.

"Why, Mrs. Parkins," he said to that worthy dame, "how do we know how it got there? Perhaps it was marked on the child as a means of identification. Anyway, I intend to use it as an important clue in my search for the parents, or whoever last was in possession of her."

Mrs. Parkins shook her head. "No, Mr. Jack, sir, that mark was put there by no 'and. Ivy was born with it, Mr. Jack; and, beggin' your pardon, sir, I don't see 'ow it will 'elp you much."

"Look here, Mrs. Parkins," he said impressively; "I want you to tell no one of my visit to you this evening; keep it to yourself."

"That I will, Mr. Jack," she replied, "and I will look in the old store cupboard in case there may 'appen to be anything I forgot to throw away."

He shook hands with her silently. She had in former years been an under nurse at the Manor and her homely face had been a haven of refuge to him when some childish terror had sent him to bury his curly head in her ample lap.

"Thanks, awfully, nursie," he said, with a smile, relapsing into the old title. "Oh, by the way, have you mentioned to anyone else what you told me about the mark on Ivy's brow?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Jack," she rejoined earnestly. "Parkins and me was afraid it might make folks look queer at 'er, so we kept it to ourselves, and did not even tell the squire for fear 'e should keep 'er away from Miss Muriel."

"Thank Heaven!" Jack breathed under his breath. Aloud he said, "Well, I know I can trust you to keep it a still greater secret now, nursie. For my sake as well as Ivy's."

As he drew near the Manor swift steps came running lightly down the gravel drive, and when they came in view he saw that it was Ivy and Muriel.

"Ah, Jack," said his sister with a laugh. "I came with Ivy half way to the lodge, as it was dark; but now I am going back, and you can chaperon her!" Then, with a gay "Good night" the girls parted, and Jack turned back with Ivy.

"Darling," he said, "I am going to begin my quest very soon now, and than when all is made clear we will be happy ever after!"

Her hand tightened on his arm. "It seems so vague, Jack" she sighed sadly; "there is nothing to go on—not even a name! I am afraid you will give me up as a bad job!"

"Don't talk like that, Ivy!" he said gently. "For your dear sake, as well as my own, I am going to do what I can, and I have an idea that I may succeed—in time."

She smiled lovingly. "You make me hope again, Jack, that I shall meet my mother!"

"Darling," he whispered, "you *shall!* Don't despair. I shall leave no stone unturned until I have found a clue. I shall go to London the beginning of the week and get the help of a good detective. Now tell me how you enjoyed the evening with Muriel," he went on. "Did you see the pater?"

"Y-es," she replied; "but perhaps it is my fancy, Jack, both Sir Trevor and Lady Maitland seemed just a little distant in their manner."

"Ah, that is because they know I love and am loved by you," he murmured. "I am not altogether in their good books just now, but I have you, and nothing else seems to matter."

At the lodge gates he paused. "Sweetheart, I suppose it is useless to ask if a single memory lingers in your mind about your babyhood?"

She shook her head. "No, Jack, I remember nothing, except strange faces, ever new; and sometimes a great deal of noise, then quiet."

He kissed her tenderly on the brow where the soft, burnished hair lay, hiding the significant birthmark.

"Good night, little sweetheart!" he said tenderly. "Sleep well."

When, a few minutes later, he turned towards the Manor, a woman slipped by him, and would have broken into a run had he not put out one strong hand and stopped her.

"Who's that?"

A voice answered unwillingly, "Mason, sir!"

"Mason," he exclaimed in surprise. "What are you doing out at this hour?"

"It is my evening out, sir," she replied sullenly. "I am always allowed out till ten."

As she hurried on he stood still and looked after her thoughtfully. "It strikes me that that woman was after something she had no business about. But it's no affair of mine, if the servants are given evenings out," he laughed. "At present I have thoughts for just one thing!" But he did not guess how nearly allied to that one thing was the business of Mason!

* * * * *

When Mason entered the Manor she was just a little breathless, but her black eyes were shining and her sallow face was flushed. She waited attentively on her mistress, Agnes Maitland, and then, when her duties were finished satisfactorily, she stole down to the door of Lady Maitland's boudoir.

"May I come in, your ladyship?" she murmured.

"I am too tired to see anyone to-night, Mason," replied Lady Maitland coldly. She was sitting in front of her table, while her wonderful copper-tinted hair was being brushed by her own particular French maid, Félice.

"If you have any message for me put it down on the table."

A sullen admiration had crept into the serving-woman's attitude towards her mistress since the occasion on which she had persuaded Sir Trevor to allow her to stay.

"Excuse me, your ladyship," she answered; "it is not a message in writing, but something I wanted to say."

Lady Maitland turned to the silent woman still brushing her hair.

"Félice, I think I have forgotten that book I felt in the drawing-room on the couch; bring it up to me."

The woman left the room obediently. Then in a quick, abrupt voice, Lady Maitland said:

"Well, Mason, be quick and say what you have to say. I am in a hurry."

Swiftly the woman stooped, and murmured a few whispered words in her ladyship's delicate ear.

"Believe me, my lady, it's true," she said earnestly; "and since your ladyship's kindness to me the other day I would do anything to serve you, your ladyship—indeed I would."

For an instant the white, blue-veined hand toying with a silver scent bottle quivered ever so slightly, then Lady Maitland raised her eyes and gazed at the woman who was eagerly waiting for her to speak, vainly attempting to read her thoughts with her keen, black eyes. But the mind of the woman in the chair was not so easily read.

After a pause, in which she had seemed to pierce beyond the soul of her now apparently devoted servant in that one brief glance, Lady Maitland turned her gaze once more upon her reflection in the mirror, a slight smile curving the lines of her mouth.

"It seems almost a pity, Mason, for so much zeal to be thrown away. In future reserve your energies for your domestic duties, instead of bestowing them upon wild flights of unbridled imagination! I am at a loss to understand why you should come to me at such an hour with such a tale!"

The woman flushed with angry mortification, and her mouth set in an ugly line. She had been almost hungering for a word of self-betrayal from the lips of the mistress who had so cleverly outwitted and baffled her the other day; but

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now she met again with the same cold hauteur and surprised disdain.

"Your ladyship will excuse me if I ask one question?" she said, obsequiously, lowering her eyes.

"Be brief!" was the curt reply.

"Does your ladyship know that in mending your black lace gown the morning after Miss Agnes walked in her sleep, I missed one of the silver tassels that hang from the sleeves? It was one off the right sleeve, your ladyship, and it seemed as though it had been torn off."

She stopped, as though expecting some exclamation, some sign that her words had been listened to; but Lady Maitland was coiling one of her long, soft strands of hair round her fingers, a bored expression on her face.

"I looked for that silver tassel, your ladyship," she went on, doggedly, "but it took time. It was nowhere in the Manor, nowhere in the garden. But it was my day out to-day, and as I went through the spinny about teatime I saw something shining on the ground. It was your silver tassel, my lady." Once more she halted, but no comment came from the smiling mouth of her mistress.

"Would your ladyship like to know where I found it?" she said, leaning forward, desperately.

"Have you not already told me, Mason?" replied Lady Maitland, calmly. "I am sorry you took so much trouble, because the gown is not worth it!"

"It was lying near the old oak, my lady," persisted the baffled woman; "and after I had picked it up, I—saw what I have told you about already!"

Slowly, and with each graceful action intensified by the loose, clinging *négligée* of soft white, Lady Maitland rose from her table, and faced the maid who had gone to such lengths to find a simple tassel missing from her gown.

Mistress and maid gazed into each other's eyes for the space of a second, and under the steady, contemptuous glance of the mistress, the shifty, glittering beads of the menial fell.

"You are a clever woman, Mason," said her ladyship slowly; "but like all clever people of a certain class, you are apt to spoil the effect of your cleverness, by a too liberal sprinkling of stupidity—and that is fatal to success in any enterprise, you know! Don't let me have cause to correct your conduct a third time; I shall not be inclined to pass it by with silent contempt, as I have done before. Now, leave my room, and send Félice to me."

She turned away, the long mane of warm-coloured hair still clinging to the back of the chair behind her—and in the crafty eyes watching her, there dwelt a strange look, half fear, half hate—wholly wonder!

"Is that all your ladyship wishes to say to me?" Mason murmured in a respectful voice.

"That is all, Mason! I require nothing else!"

"Good night, your ladyship!"

"Good night, Mason!"

When Félice had finished disrobing her mistress and had left her for the night, Lady Maitland stepped across to her husband's dressing-room on the other side of the corridor. It was empty, he had not yet come upstairs. She wondered whether the search had been very long for the lost brooch, and a slight smile flitted across her face, as the memory of poor Parkins' consternation recurred to her.

As she turned to leave the room, a sudden thought made her hesitate. She closed the door and went swiftly towards a cabinet by her husband's dressing-table. It was not locked, and she drew out something small and glittering. She looked at it curiously, the pupils of her eyes dilating until the violet in them grew black under the influence of a suppressed excitement. A slight shiver shook her, and her mouth quivered involuntarily.

"This may be useful," she murmured. "He will not miss it, there is another in the drawer. And I shall feel safe, in case—in case——" Her thoughts trailed off into a tangle of tremulous speculation, and stepping softly from the room, she slipped back into her own.

As she locked her new toy in a sufficiently secure hiding-place at the bottom of a long drawer where she kept her private correspondence, a gentle sigh fluttered to her lips.

"Forewarned is forearmed," she murmured. "I don't think that woman meant anything more than an attempt to surprise me—unless it really were the case, and she did see. But even so—that is powerless to hurt me now—and I shall take care that I keep myself from such petty vampires in future!"

She lifted her head, and a low laugh came from her lips.

"They little guess how strong I am to fight—not with the useless weapons of supplication and fear, but with the two-edged sword of brain and strategy!"

A slight noise from the direction of the window stopped the laugh on her mouth, and sent an expectant look into her eyes.

The long windows that led out on to a balcony had neither the curtains nor blinds drawn, and anyone outside could see quite plainly into the room.

"What can that be?" she murmured. "Surely——"

She rose quickly, and went up to the windows. As she did so, she caught a glimpse of a sallow face disappearing over the balcony. With a splendid courage she flung open one of the long French windows, pierced the darkness with keen eyes, and saw a figure running swiftly in the shadow of the house.

As she gazed, it came suddenly forward under the pale gleam of a moon-streak, and, standing motionless for a moment, turned its face towards the window on the balcony. Lady Maitland raised her hand to her mouth to stifle the cry that rose to her lips. For the figure was that of a man, and the face was one she had hoped never to see again!

NINTH CHAPTER.
The Return of the Wanderer.

The fog was settling down for a three days' stay, and the passengers arriving at Charing Cross by the Boulogne and Folkestone mail, looked cold and apprehensive about reaching their respective destinations in such a sea of uncertainty.

One man alone was glad to see the train slowing into the station, and when he stepped out of the Pullman carriage on to the platform, he gazed round with a sigh of content.

"Well! I never thought I should inhale a fog with delight!" he murmured; "but after sixteen years absence from it, it's just like greeting an old friend. After all, there's nothing like a long stay abroad to make a man a rabid patriot!"

A porter carried his traps to a hansom, then said: "Where to, sir?"

"The Orient Club, Hanover Square," was the reply, and the hansom bowled off cautiously, wending a hazardous way through the maze of vehicular traffic in a London fog.

In one of the long, narrow glasses on either side of the hansom, the man took a keen and swiftly scrutinising glance at himself. Apparently the inspection pleased him, for he leant back with a pleased smile on his sunburnt, refined face, and stroked his long, sweeping moustache with thoughtful fingers.

"Yes; the years have changed me considerably," he murmured. "No one would recognise me now, not even my best friend; or"—and the pupils of his slightly narrow-set eyes contracted suddenly—"even my worst enemy! I shall now feel able to enjoy myself with a free conscience, and revel once more in the intoxication of London gaiety!"

Arriving at the Orient Club, he made arrangements to stay some weeks, and wrote his name in a bold hand in the "Board" book; then was shown to his room. The hall porter gazed at the signature thoughtfully. "That gentleman can't 'ave been 'ere for many years," he muttered. "I don't recollect the name; but then comin' from foreign parts, it's not likely that I should remember 'im."

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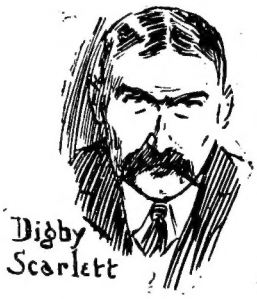

He looked at the signature again. It was an uncommon one, out of the usual rut of names, and the hall porter conned it thoughtfully. "'Digby Scarlett,' it's a name not easy to forget once you've seen it," he muttered.

Upstairs in the bedroom he had engaged, Digby Scarlett was dressing for dinner. He meant to enjoy himself this first evening in London. A long exile from civilisation had bitten him with the desire to indulge in every extravagance.

In the dining-room of the club he looked about with curious eyes. He knew no one; and though his name as a traveller and writer was probably known to most of the men present, personally he was a social pariah—longing for the sound of his fellow-creatures' voices, yet hesitating to take the first step towards acquaintance.

After dinner he picked up an evening paper and glanced down the column of amusements. "Let me see," he muttered, "if I can pick out a musical piece with one or two familiar names in it. I want to see some faces that I know."

But everything was new; all the old landmarks seemed to have been washed away by the tide of time. Just such names as "Irving" and "Tree," with other leading lights remained in the old places; but the gay, fascinating little dancers, and bird-throated choristers had made way for younger and fresher successors.

He put the paper down with a sense of disappointment.

He was beginning to realise how much alone he was, now that he had returned to his native country; far, far more lonely than when in the heart of forests, or on the dusty plain of deserts. For then, the great forests and deserts had drawn him, through the medium of mystery and star-lit nights, into the bosom of fellowship; they knew he understood, and was not one of those fiends of civilisation that wanted to build cities, or hew down their young children for timber.

But, in the heart of London, the unceasing hum of humanity fell with a meaningless roar upon Digby Scarlett's ears. The voice of the people roused no answering note in his soul, for his heart was not with them, and the cry went over his head.

"Excuse me, won't you? But if you are looking for a decent show, there is an awfully good turn at the Empire to-night;" and starting quickly round, Digby Scarlett met the frank, unembarrassed gaze of a good-looking young fellow, with a fair, boyish face, that was peculiarly attractive to the jaded eyes of the older man.

"Thanks for the tip," he smiled, and a gleam of dazzling teeth a woman might have envied threw into sudden contrast the brown of his skin, and inky blackness of the tired, restless eyes. "How did you guess that I was looking for such frivolous dissipation?" he continued; "had I the air of a pleasure-seeker?"

The boy laughed, and slightly reddened. "Sitting behind you, I could not help noticing that you were taking all the theatres in turn down the column, and when you put the paper down and did not move, I guessed that you had found nothing to please you; so I ventured to speak to you."

"I am more grateful than I can say," Digby Scarlett replied. "The fact is, I am feeling very much alone. This is my first evening in London after sixteen years of a nomadic pilgrimage; and I have the odd sensation of being a stranger within my own gates!"

The boy looked at him curiously. The restless eyes, aquiline nose, and burnt-looking skin, all betokened a man of a roving nature, of many moods—some, probably, not pleasant ones. The smooth black hair—grey on the temples—lent him an air of distinction; and the heavy, dark moustache concealed his mouth—the true index to his character. But his voice was cultured, and the note of isolation in it appealed to the boy's imagination.

He drew a card from his pocket, and handed it to the older man. "That is my name," he said, with a simple dignity. "I am also alone in town for a few days; I shall be most happy if you will let me be of any service to you."

The other replied by a vivid smile, and stretched out a long, sinewy hand. "Thanks, awfully!" he said. "I have no such details as 'cards' on me just now; but my name is Digby Scarlett."

The boy's eyes dilated with astonishment. "What! *The* 'Digby Scarlett' of the Royal Society of Antiquaries?" he said, in an awed tone. "Why my father's favourite book is 'Wonders we Walk on,' that you wrote."

A slight flush mantled the tanned skin of the traveller. "I am afraid you over-rate my work," he said. "I am a very poor member of the Society. In my youth I wrote fiction. But I have not yet made myself acquainted with the name of my new friend," he went on, hurriedly, as though anxious to change the subject; and then, looking at the card in his hand, he read, "Mr. John Maitland, Maitland Manor, Melton."

"Ah! I used to know Melton once," he said, musingly; "but that was long ago. It's a pretty county, and if the recollections of my boyhood are right, it had pretty girls in it, too!"

Jack Maitland was silent. The vision of a sweet, flower-like face, rose up in his mind. Who, better than he, could speak of the beauties of Melton?

"I see; I have sent your thoughts back to their native county," said Digby Scarlett, with a somewhat cynical smile; a feeling of envy rising in his heart for the capacity this boy had to love, and respect, a woman.

"Yes," replied Jack, a retrospective smile touching his mouth, "my thoughts did take a momentary flutter to their nest. But that will not prevent me from doing justice to my post as pilot to you in this little village!" he laughed gaily. "May I have the pleasure of accompanying you to the Empire this evening to see the 'turn' I recommended?"

The two men left the club together, and soon were watching a "rose ballet" from the stalls of the Empire.

As Digby Scarlett sat beside his so strangely-found companion, and listened to the hopes and aspirations of the boy, twenty-three years his junior, his sinister mind reviled the fate that had withheld from him the right of fatherhood. His isolation was all the keener because he knew the boy would pass out of his life in a few days, leaving him with a sense of intensified loneliness.

"Will you dine with me to-morrow?" he said, when they rose to go.

Jack Maitland hesitated. "It's awfully good of you, Mr. Scarlett, but the fact is, I am not certain that I shall be at liberty. I have some business to transact that may take all my time."

"Anyhow, I shall see you at the 'Orient'?" queried the older man, almost anxiously.

"Oh, yes," said the boy, flattered by the obvious desire for his society. "And I am very nearly certain that I shall be free."

As they took up their coats, something dropped from an inner pocket of that flung over the arm of Jack Maitland. Digby Scarlett stooped and picked it up. It was an envelope containing some hard substance like cardboard, probably a photo of some sort.

A small group of people separated him from his companion; so slipping the envelope into his pocket, he followed after him, keeping the tall, well-set-up figure in sight until he reached the foyer, and there the fog was so bad, that after a little futile search among the crowd waiting for carriages or for friends, Digby Scarlett hailed a passing hansom and drove to the Orient Club.

"I shall probably find him there," he murmured, "this fog is enough to make a man lose his *head*."

But arriving at the Orient he found that his friend had not yet arrived, and with a shrug of his shoulders, he went to his room.

"I wish the boy were in," he murmured. Then a cynical laugh rose to his lips. "To think that I—Digby Scarlett—

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should worry about the probably intentional absence of a young boy I shall very likely never meet again!"

He took off his coat, and felt in the pocket for a cigarette; as he did so, he touched the envelope that he had picked up for Jack Maitland. He drew it out slowly, and looked at it. Then a curious light crept into his eyes—a mocking, sinister gleam.

"I suppose this is the photo of the lady of his dreams!" he muttered. "They always carry them about—when they are young! I wonder what she is like. The boy ought to have good taste—he knows how to choose good wine!"

Slowly, and with curious eyes, he opened the envelope, and drew out the piece of cardboard. It was a photograph—he was right in his surmise—and of a woman, too!

Under the light of the electric globes he scanned the picture with puzzled eyes. It was an amateur likeness, badly taken at that; but he could see that it was the picture of a young girl in a muslin dress; her mouth was parted in a smile of tender query, and the shadow of a large sun-bonnet threw a shade into her eyes. But it was a face that made Digby Scarlett—hardened man of the world as he was—draw in his breath with a sibilant sound, and his eyes deepen and glow with startled admiration.

"Truly, 'a face to make an old man glad!'" he murmured. Then, with a sudden exclamation, he drew the photo nearer to him, peering with an intent gaze into the eyes of the girl looking up at him.

"Great Heavens! I see now what made me wonder where I had seen a similar face before!" he murmured. "It is strangely like, and yet unlike! This has the softness of the pearl; while that other had the hardness of the diamond! Yet, if it were not for the lapse of years, I should almost be inclined to think that I was a young man in love once more!"

He laughed harshly. "But, by this time, that other one is probably fat and grey, old and commonplace! I congratulate the boy upon his choice! But I will take the liberty of keeping this 'picture'!" he said, with a bitter smile. "He has the original—I will retain the copy!"

* * * * *

"So you have no better clue than the one I have already received, Mr. Maitland?" And the mild, blue eyes of Detective-Sergeant Gilbert Chase sent a sudden flash of inquiry into the face of Sir Trevor Maitland's son and heir.

Jack Maitland shook his head. It was the morning following the night of the black fog, when he had missed his interesting and celebrated acquaintance, Digby Scarlett. When, after a few hours' aimless wandering, he had found his way back to the Orient Club, the whole place was in darkness, and at breakfast he was told that Mr. Scarlett had already left the club.

Two hours later he found his way to the office of the man, in whose hands he intended to place the tracing of his sweetheart's birth and parentage. The few details regarding the finding of the child by the lodge gates when a baby of three, he had already related to the eminent detective; and, with the exception of the one secret shared alone by himself and Mrs. Parkins, he had kept nothing back.

"I have told you all I know," he said evasively. "It was fourteen years ago, and there is no linen with any distinctive marks to trace by. All the inquiries I have been able to make, I have asked—you know all, except——" He stopped suddenly, flushing like a guilty child.

A slow, persuasive smile flickered in the mild blue orbs of the detective. He had sounded the depths.

"Ah! I knew the important evidence would come last," he said drily; "it always does!"

Jack Maitland faced him squarely. "I can trust you, I know—and my confidence with you will be sacred."

"For twenty years," said Gilbert Chase, slowly, "confidences have gone in at one ear and out of the other—but never through my mouth! Pray proceed, Mr. Maitland!"

"It is this," replied Jack; "I have found out that on the brow of 'Ivy Strange' there is a—a scar—a mark hidden under her hair. It may mean something to go by—or nothing."

"Yes, yes, of course, Mr. Maitland," said Gilbert Chase, thoughtfully; "it all depends upon the nature of the mark. Was it caused by a knock, or was it a birthmark?"

"I fancy it must have been born with her," he replied, a feeling that he was desecrating his innocent young love in discussing her with a stranger, making him answer curtly.

"Ah, yes; and what is the mark like?" murmured the detective; "has it any distinctive shape?"

Jack hesitated, and, for a moment, almost regretted that he had decided to put it in the hands of a detective; they were such cold, unemotional creatures.

"Yes," he answered abruptly. "It was the mark of a—a broad arrow!"

For an instant the detective's eye flickered with a startled surprise; he was not accustomed to being taken unawares.

"Ah, I see," he murmured. "Have you a photo of the young lady?"

Jack put his hand in his pocket gladly. The worst had come and gone; the rest was in the capable hands of Gilbert Chase. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise. The photo he had cherished for so long had gone.

"What a pity," said Gilbert Chase; "it might have helped me."

"I had it last night," he replied ruefully; "it must have dropped out of my pocket in the hurry of putting on my coat in the fog."

"Well," said the detective, rising, "I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mr. Maitland. If I want you particularly I will send for you, or come down to Melton. Good-day, sir."

When Jack reached the Orient Club he found Digby Scarlett lunching.

"Well?" said that gentleman, with a sudden smile, "what do you mean by losing yourself last night? I was almost worried."

"I'm sorry if I put you out," said the other; "I missed my way, and you had gone out this morning when I came down to breakfast. I don't fancy I shall stay long in town," he went on; "I have a good mind to return to-morrow."

Digby Scarlett sighed.

"Lucky man to have somewhere to return to. I would give twenty years of my life to be in your shoes!"

Jack Maitland blushed with a sudden impulse.

"I wonder, Mr. Scarlett," he began, hesitatingly, "whether you would come down with me to Melton? We can give you some good hunting, and my father would be awfully glad to meet you."

Digby Scarlett hesitated. Then the memory of the photo in the envelope reposing in his inner waistcoat pocket decided him.

"Thanks, awfully, Maitland," he said, with genuine feeling. "I will be delighted to accept your invitation."

The following afternoon Jack Maitland and his new friend started for Melton and Maitland Manor—and what lay beyond.

TENTH CHAPTER.
A Bolt from the Blue.

It was the half hour after lunch, and Lady Maitland was in her boudoir, talking to Heriot North. It was a dainty nest, in which the dominant tone was white, touched here and there by flashes of old gold, and on marble pedestals stood antique vases filled with yellow flowers.

There was an absence of the ordinary knick-knacks and prettiness usually associated with such apartments; nothing seemed wanting in the slightest detail, yet there lacked something indefinable that puzzled and eluded detection. It seemed almost as though the beautiful mistress of the Manor feared to im-

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press her taste upon a room into which those who were antagonistic to her may come.

There were no draperies to the door or windows; Lady Maitland was wise to avoid them, they harboured mischief. Instead, great jars stood in the window corners, filled with a profusion of blossoms.

Two silver frames held the only photos in the room; one was the likeness of Sir Trevor Maitland, the other of Woolf—her son. But that of the boy was on a small table where the mother could see it from her couch.

The gown she was wearing was of cream cloth, an attractive design in tea-gowns; while round her waist was a girdle of glittering old gold, finishing in two heavy tassels at the hem of her gown.

Like her surroundings the mistress suggested an idea of cold beauty, the white and the gold of the room claiming kindred links with her gown and hair.

Heriot North had returned from town the day before, and had called to pay his respects at the Manor the following afternoon. It was not until he had entered the boudoir with Lady Maitland that he spoke about the subject on which he had called.

As his eyes dwelt upon the tall, lissom figure of Sir Trevor's wife, the thought flashed into his mind that she resembled some mediæval saint in her aloof attitude towards the more ordinary weaknesses of human nature. In all the many times he had seen her, he had always encountered the same placid graciousness, heard the low, caressing voice always strike the same note, even when the barely veiled insolences of her step-daughter Agnes were aimed at her.

She glanced up, and caught his gaze. "Well, Mr. North," she laughed lightly; "about what are you thinking so seriously?"

"I was thinking," he said, "that you were wasting your sweetness on the desert air when you let yourself be imposed upon by such hangers-on to your charity as the specimen of human nature for whom I executed your commission of pity the other day."

A startled gleam flickered to her eyes, as she said carelessly: "Ah, I—I—have not seen the poor creature myself. I have taken over the *protégé* of a friend. Was he very—awful then?"

He laughed. "Just about the most unmitigated ruffian I have ever seen! I am glad you were spared the sight."

"How was it you saw him then?" she asked, a vague wonder in her mind whether she had done well to trust this man after all.

"I had just entered the District Messenger depot," he answered, "and given up the letter containing the gold you had intrusted to me, when I noticed a particularly objectionable-looking man loaf in. My erstwhile police-court experiences as a reporter told me that the fellow had a peculiarly intimate knowledge of the interior of His Majesty's prisons; and as I turned to watch him, to my surprise I saw that the beggar was handed the letter I had left for your *protégé*."

He leant forward earnestly, and said, "Allow me to offer you the advice of a man who has seen more of the 'seamy side' than you can ever imagine, Lady Maitland. Be very careful of the characters of the people to whom you give your charity. I should have every inquiry made in future, if I were you."

She shivered slightly. If he only knew that the *protégé* against whom he warned her had returned to Melton, and was still watching for some opportunity of meeting her, Heriot North would wonder still more at her strange propensity!

She had imagined every possible reason for the man coming back to the place where his liberty was in jeopardy, but could evolve none from the many points she had raised. Now she only waited for him to make some sign.

What had happened that he should be so careless of his safety? was the question she had asked herself over and over again.

She looked up, and saw Heriot North gazing at her with a strange questioning in his eyes.

"I will certainly avoid all promiscuous charity in future, Mr. North," she said gaily; "but I will be glad if you will not mention this particular case to my husband. He may think me foolish, and—I should not like to vex him. The man was recommended to me as a worthy subject! But come," she laughed, "let us talk of something else. Had you much time for theatres in town?"

He roused himself with an effort. He had been thinking what a symphony she made in the white and gold, and the firelight sending ruby tints in and out the waves of her hair.

"I went to the 'Empire,'" he replied; "and it certainly was not particularly gay," he laughed. "The evening I went there was a thick fog on. By the way, is Jack in town now? Because I fancy I saw him at the 'Empire.' I could not swear it was he, the fog hung over everything; but there was someone remarkably like him there, chatting and laughing with some man."

Lady Maitland raised her eyes. "Really? He has been in town nearly a week now, I believe. What was the man like? I wonder if he is a Melton friend."

"I cannot remember," he said carelessly; "I did not see his face."

He rose abruptly. "I must go now. I will look in again soon if I can."

"Won't you come in to dinner?" she said sweetly. "We shall be a family party—only the girls, Sir Trevor, and myself. And it must be lonely up at 'The Hollies' by yourself."

He bit his lip. "Yes, it is. So lonely that I dare not let myself come here too often, Lady Maitland, in case——"

"In case what?"

"'The Hollies' becomes so unbearable that I throw it all up—and go away!"

"You must not say that," she said quickly. "What will your friends do? We are beginning to rely upon you already, Mr. North."

He turned to her passionately.

"'We!' Who is 'we,' Lady Maitland? If, for a moment, I could imagine that—that you—cared——"

He stopped suddenly, something in her cold, proud face freezing the mad words on his tongue.

For a moment there was silence; then he stumbled to the door.

"Forgive me—if you can!" he muttered. "I shall never forgive myself!"

"Mr. North," said Lady Maitland's low, sweet voice; "one moment; I wish to speak to you."

He came back wonderingly, fearfully, to where she stood, a graceful, imperious figure; her eyes shining with sad pity and a gentle dignity in her manner.

"Mr. North," she said slowly, "I want to show you something. Look! You see those two photographs—my husband and—my child?"

He bowed his head dumbly.

"Well, Mr. North," continued the sweet voice, "between those two human banks the river of my life is flowing, evenly and peacefully. I have no desire for it to leave them behind and merge into the cruel, open sea of wreckage. I am happy—now; and"—her voice broke slightly—"help me to remain so. Be my friend—my loyal, true, disinterested friend," she continued, an undercurrent of eagerness making her speech falter. "You don't know how much I need one!"

She put out her hand and he took it in his with trembling fingers.

"Your kindness is more than I deserve," he murmured. "But if ever you will give me the opportunity of proving my devoted friendship, I will not fail you! For once in my life I have come face to face with a good, pure woman; and I thank God for it!"

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He turned on his heel, and the door closed noiselessly.

For a while Lady Maitland stood motionless, then a slight smile curved her lips, and her eyes sparkled brilliantly.

"That was a very clever bit of acting!" she murmured. "And yet—and yet, I am sorry for the man. He takes me seriously! But he will be of infinitely more service to me as my friend than—anything else. I wish he had not seen that man. It was awkward! He called me a 'good, pure woman'!" she laughed. "So I am—so I would have been had not Fate intervened!" She clasped her hands passionately, then, after a pause, the calm returned to her face, and she left the room.

Half an hour later Sir Trevor Maitland entered his wife's dressing-room. He had had a long, successful meet. The fox had broken cover early, and had given them a good run, and he was consequently in high spirits. In his hand he had an open telegram.

"My dear," he said, after his wife had dismissed her maid. "this is from Jack, sent from St. Pancras. He will be here to-night to dinner, and brings a friend with him. He did not say *who*, but says for a few days' sport. They will probably be here in a short time now."

Lady Maitland laughed. "Very well, Trevor. I will be glad to see the boy again. Heriot North told me he saw him at the Empire with a man. This is probably the friend he is bringing back with him."

"Look your best, darling," said her husband. "I want Jack's friend to envy me my wife."

Lady Maitland laughed. "I am wearing my white tulle gown; that is sure to fascinate him!"

When her husband had left the room, and she was clasping her bracelets on her wrists, another interruption came. It was Ivy Strange, who asked to be allowed to see her for a few moments.

"Well, Ivy," said her ladyship graciously, looking at the girl's sweet, soft beauty that, waif as she was, gave her the bearing and appearance of an aristocrat. "I have a few seconds to give you, that is all."

The girl came forward slowly; her simple serge dress and felt hat setting off her fresh, pure face and figure.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you at this hour, Lady Maitland, but I have a message for you—a note."

The woman's heart throbbed suddenly.

"A note; who gave it to you, Ivy?" she said sharply.

"A boy in the village saw me coming up to the Manor," replied Ivy quietly, "and asked me to bring it for him, and give it into your hands only. I hope it is not very important," she said shyly. "I am afraid I loitered rather!"

But Lady Maitland was not listening to the girlish excuses. She had torn open the envelope, and was reading with glassy eyes the illiterate words scrawled on the piece of paper.

"*The man you got the laugh over is now going to laugh at you. You lied to me. I know that your first husband still lives. I 'ave seen 'im. Send or rite by return to M.H. post office, Chorlton, inclosing five 'undred pounds or I will call at Manor and tell all.*"

The woman sat crushing up the piece of paper with desperate fingers. Her luck was leaving her. Was that man telling the truth, or was this only a threat? She wondered why he had not trusted Mason with the letter as before. The voice of the girl roused her.

"Are you ill, Lady Maitland? Can I do anything for you?"

Her words set a train of thought working in the woman's mind. Who better than this girl to be trusted—not confided in—but made use of? Servants were never reliable; this innocent child would think no harm, and levy no toll.

She put her white hand affectionately on Ivy's shoulder. "No, dear, not ill; only just a little upset at some news that affects someone dear to me. I wonder, will you write a letter for me, dear?" she went on caressingly. "I will not keep you very long."

"Oh, yes, with pleasure!" said the girl eagerly. "I shall be only too pleased to do anything for you that I can."

Lady Maitland smiled. "And I feel that I can trust you not to chatter like Muriel, or Woolf would about it, afterwards. You are a wise little girl, Ivy, and I think I know someone else who agrees with me in appreciating you!"

The girl blushed. "I will write for you now, if you wish it," she said simply.

"Thank you, dear," said her ladyship. "Sit down at my table and write: 'Am sending half; will forward to London address. Not advisable here for various reasons.'

"That will do. Don't sign it; my—my correspondent will understand," and a harsh laugh came from between her lips. The girl obeyed, then, under Lady Maitland's instructions, put on the envelope: "M. H. Post Office, Chorlton," which was the village adjoining that of Melton.

"Thank you, dear child," murmured her ladyship, and, stooping, she touched the girl's brow with a light kiss. "I will not forget you for this service. I think I will make you my amanuensis, you write so prettily. Now run away and post that for me."

When the girl had slipped away, Lady Maitland took the dirty piece of paper and dropped it in the fire. "I only wish I could do the same with the writer!" she muttered, then, with a bitter smile, she looked at herself in the glass.

"You are to fight! This creature must be silenced! The demands will only go on increasing until the end comes. And how do I know he is not lying? Yet, why should he risk coming back here? But that girl will conduct any correspondence for me." She smiled. "Nothing will be done that can compromise myself. For my boy, I will take all precautions! Now to go and see this wonderful friend of Jack's."

With a tender smile on her lips she went softly downstairs. From the drawing-room a sound of laughter and merriment floated to her ears. Above all she heard the shrill voice of Woolf, talking excitedly to someone.

Lady Maitland paused on the threshold, and sent a quick look round in search of Heriot North. He was not there. Another man, tall and dark, his back turned to her, was talking to Agnes, who was unusually bright and affable.

"Here's mummie!" cried Woolf, "at last!"

There was a lull in the conversation, as attention turned suddenly upon the woman in the doorway, whose violet eyes, under the shadow of burnished hair, seemed to shine and glow like sapphires.

"Ah!" said her husband's voice, "let me introduce Jack's friend, my dear."

The man came forward slowly, a gleam of dazzling teeth throwing up the blackness of his moustache. Sir Trevor Maitland's wife glanced up at him with a swift smile of welcome.

"This," continued Sir Trevor, "is Mr. Digby Scarlett—my wife!"

(Another long instalment next week.)

When a damsel tells a young man that she has dreamt about him the night before, it is high time for him to begin to be careful.

Business Man: "I thought I'd surprise my clerks by getting down to the office at the opening hour." Customer: "And did you?" "No; there wasn't one of them there."

Father: "Your schoolmaster can't be such a mean, unkind man as you make out. I noticed his son has all the toys he can possibly want." Tommy: "Why, those are what his father takes away from the other boys."

A countryman walked into a newspaper office to advertise the death of a relative. "What is your charge?" he asked of the clerk. "We charge eight shillings per inch." "Oh!" said the countryman, "I cannot afford that. My friend was six feet three inches."

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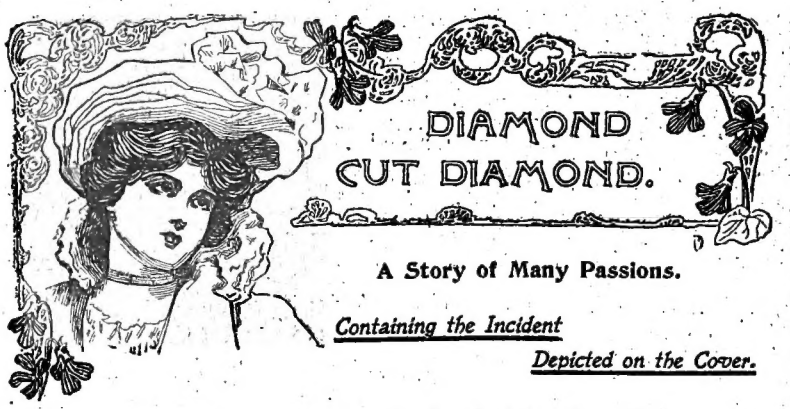

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

A Story of Many Passions.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

Marie Furness walked rapidly up the broad stairs of Oak Grange, and entered the room which had been assigned to her as the guest of its owner and occupier, Sir Geoffrey Wilde, Bart.

She was a dark-skinned beauty, with evidences of Castilian origin in the flashing, jet-black eyes, the glistening coils of raven hair, the small, delicately-shaped head and lithe, willowy form, and, most of all, in the dusky olive of the flawless complexion.

The face, even in repose, was sufficiently striking. But, as she swiftly closed and locked the door of her room, its appearance and expression were beyond description.

The thin lips curled, half in defiance, half in scorn. The flashing eyes were cruel, not with passive, but active hatred. Every line of the dark, fascinating face was pregnant with passion—passion that will neither be quenched nor subdued.

With clenched hands and heaving bosom, she began rapidly to pace the floor of her room, her small feet falling almost noiselessly on the soft, rich carpet beneath. And as she walked, the inward working of the mind revealed itself in the dusky face, and showed that the two great opposing forces which govern frail humanity fought in the breast of this beautiful, passionate woman, so strong to love, so strong to hate.

At last the pent-up storm within broke forth in quick, fierce whispers—suppressed, subdued—as if afraid of being overheard.

"I could kill her—yes, kill her!" she said passionately. "And if the worst comes—— Oh, Heavens, I could not bear it—I *will* not! I would rather die than see that pale-faced, passionless graven image, who calls herself by the name of woman, the wife of this handsome, gay young Earl of Deercourt! If I cannot marry him, I swear she shall not! But I must—I must! Surely I am not lacking in loveliness that I cannot command love if I will?"

The cruel lustre of the dark eyes faded away, and a soft, dreamy light took its place. The whole face grew eloquent with love and longing, as intensely passionately potent as the hate and scorn which had preceded it.

Stepping quickly over to her dressing-glass, she critically scanned the lovely oval face, now transfigured with love, which it reflected. And, as she gazed, she smiled reassuringly.

"No," she said softly—"I would not exchange with any woman in all the county. I have nothing to fear on that score. And yet he scarcely notices me, while he dances perpetual attendance on this Lucille Warwick. Oh, how I hate her!" And the small hands clenched, while the lithe form quivered with a rush of fierce emotion.

Her eyes wandered to the window, overlooking the small but exquisitely preserved park of Oak Grange. Far away in the distance the gleam of a white dress among the great old oaks caught her eye, and an involuntary exclamation escaped her lips.

With straining eyes and rigid form she gazed out to the distant trees. Two people were there—a man and a girl—the former tall, the latter slight and graceful—almost, but not wholly screened by the thick foliage of the park trees. And they were standing in the attitude of lovers.

Nor was this all, for the eye of Marie Furness, quickened by jealousy, recognised in these unconscious lovers the forms of the Earl of Deercourt and her rival, Lucille Warwick.

With a sharp pang at her heart, she sank back into a chair, and tried to think calmly and collectedly. Long she sat thus, and when at last she rose the beautiful face was hard and cruel, and alight with the lust of revenge.

* * * * *

Downstairs Sir Geoffrey Wilde was sitting, with knit brows and tightly-compressed lips, in the temporary seclusion of the Grange library.

No eye was present to read and interpret the dark, forbidding expression of his face, and in this security he abandoned the mask of polite indifference which was so habitual to him, and, like the beautiful but terrible woman in the room above, gave rein to the passions which dominated him.

Sir Geoffrey Wilde was a powerfully-built, well-groomed man in middle life. His title was unencumbered by the usual responsibilities incumbent on the possessor of such worldly honours—the responsibilities of wealth.

But though the baronetcy was unencumbered, the estates which accompanied it were not. Indeed, he scarcely knew where to turn to satisfy the clamorous demands of certain Hebrew gentlemen whose acquaintance he had contracted in the hour of his difficulties.

On the other hand, the young Earl of Deercourt, who had not long passed his majority, was immensely rich, with estates and personality large enough to satisfy the needs of half-a-dozen baronets such as he.

But this was not all. For, by right of succession, the life of this young Earl of Deercourt was the only thing that prevented him—Sir Geoffrey Wilde—from inheriting this immense wealth. It was, therefore, greatly to his advantage that the present Earl should die without issue. Indeed, the more speedily the Earl—to use his own expression—"hopped the twig," the better for himself.

Finally, Sir Geoffrey Wilde was extravagant, ambitious, and unscrupulous. But though he sometimes even boasted of the first of these three virtues, he was sufficiently a man of the world to effectually conceal the remaining two. And yet his every thought of late was dominated by these twin factors.

Avarice had become to him a veritable god, to whom he looked for salvation from his many difficulties. And to the attainment of that end he was prepared to adopt any course, practise any treachery, consistent with his own personal safety.

Thus, even in crime, he was a coward. But how was this end to be achieved? He, and he alone, must be the Earl of Deercourt, and that before the year was out, or it meant ruin—positive, hopeless ruin—to himself.

"My bad luck!" he muttered savagely. "One miserable life—the life of a mere boy—between me and all these riches!" And he ground his teeth in impotent anger. "The unsuspecting little fool!" he continued. "And he looks upon me as his counsellor and guide!"

He laughed sardonically to himself.

"I wonder what he would say if he knew that the counsel I give him as to the management of his estates was not so disinterested as it appears? I wonder what he would say if he knew that my motive in asking him here is to watch for an opportunity of ridding the world, without risk to myself, of the only obstacle in my path to fortune?"

Again he laughed softly to himself, but a moment later the brows came together again and the whole face hardened to a look of sinister reflection.

"I wish I could see my way out of this," he muttered.

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"But I must be circumspect. Whatever happens, there are plenty of guests in the house—that is one consolation. I wonder what the fool is up to now? Paying court, perhaps, to that feminine volcano, Miss Marie Furness. But he barely notices her, for all the sidelong flashes of the black, passionate eyes.

"Truly, men are fools in their choice of women! No, I expect it's the blonde, not the brunette—the iceberg, not the volcano." He paused, and then, "Good Heavens!" he muttered hoarsely, "what if the boy should marry!"

He got up agitatedly and walked to the window. And there, under the distant park trees, his quick eye caught the same picture which had caused Marie Furness, in her room upstairs, to utter that involuntary exclamation of rage, and the look that crept into his face too was hard and cruel and full of sinister resolve.

An hour later Sir Geoffrey Wilde was sitting at his ease in one of the big lounge-chairs that occupied the shady verandah which skirted the southern wall of Oak Grange.

His face had again assumed its habitual expression of supreme indifference, and he sat languidly smoking a choice Havana and lazily watching the blue-grey spirals of smoke emitted by his thin, unsympathetic lips. Most of his guests were out riding, while a few were on the river, to which the park sloped down picturesquely in pleasing undulations of rich verdure.

There was a step on the verandah, approaching him from behind, but he did not stir. A moment later, someone stopped almost on a level with his chair, and he heard the soft rustle of a woman's dress. He let the hand fall that held the cigar, and noiselessly turned his head.

Marie Furness was standing on the edge of the verandah, gazing out over the wide sweep of sunlit lawn to the park beyond. Clearly she had not noticed him, for her back was towards him, and he could not but admire—critical as he was in his judgment generally—the willowy grace of the slender figure and the perfect poise of the delicate head.

Presently she half-turned, and, still unconscious of her host's presence, picked up a newspaper that lay on a wicker stand at her side. But it was evident the paper had little interest for her, and Sir Geoffrey, watching her with calm, impassive face, made a mental note of the fact that this "feminine volcano" was in that state of internal restlessness which immediately precedes, or follows, an eruption.

Suddenly the whole expression of the dusky face changed. The eyes dilated, and became fixed on the newspaper in her hand, as if attracted by some irresistible fascination. The bosom heaved convulsively, the dry lips parted, and the breath came quick and gasping.

Involuntarily she lifted one trembling hand to her heart, as if to still the tumult within.

Sir Geoffrey, roused out of his languid apathy, followed with his own the direction of the fascinated eyes, till he had mentally located the precise spot on the paper upon which the eyes were riveted.

Then he noted the number of the opposite page, which was within his line of vision, and, having concluded his mental notes for subsequent investigation, he slowly and noiselessly turned his head on its satin cushion and languidly closed his eyes to simulate slumber.

The act was not remarkable in the man, for, except when it suited his purpose, a strict observance of the first principles of honour was not one of Sir Geoffrey Wilde's weaknesses.

The next instant he caught the girl's voice—dry, hard, bitter, relentless—and, hardened man of the world as he was, a chill ran through him as he listened.

"Ah!" came the whisper, "this—this is my revenge! She shall never marry him! Once rid of her, my path will be clear! This very night I will do what I have to do—yes, this very night!"

Sir Geoffrey heard the rustle of the paper as it fell from the girl's fingers, and a quick, stealthy, retreating footstep told him that he was alone.

For fully ten minutes he remained motionless in his chair. Then he rose and picked up the fallen paper. He was not long in discovering what he wanted. It was an account of the death of a well-known Society man who had been found dead in his bed under peculiar circumstances.

As Sir Geoffrey read what those circumstances were, and connected them with the impassioned words of Marie Furness, he sank back in his chair with an involuntary shudder, not of horror but of fear.

Presently an idea came to him, and he gave a great start. The moisture stood upon his forehead, and he gripped the arms of his chair to steady himself. Then the thin lips parted, a low, mirthless laugh escaped them, and, rising with a sudden bound, he cast the paper from him and re-entered the house.

* * * * *

Evening had closed in over Oak Grange, lights glowed from the many windows, and Sir Geoffrey's guests, returned from their various excursions by river and road, chatted gaily in groups in drawing and billiard-room, or wandered along the moonlit paths of the old park. It was in the latter place that Sir Geoffrey met the solitary figure of Marie Furness.

The overwrought girl, unable to endure the incessant babble of the guests in the Baronet's drawing-room, had escaped to the grounds to think out her plans uninterruptedly. But her watchful host knew of her going, and, having a word or two to say to his lovely guest before she retired for the night, had followed her.

"Miss Furness!" he said in affected surprise as he came up with her. "Surely the gods are propitious at last! I looked for you all the afternoon, but you were nowhere to be found."

The girl looked up quickly and in some surprise.

"I am sorry," she said. "I had several things to do this afternoon—letters and other nuisances—and I spent the time chiefly in my room."

"Ah!" drawled the Baronet, "I never write letters, and, having no inclination to sit astride a horse or wrestle with an oar, I looked for you in the hope of having a quiet little chat. But you were invisible, as angels, they tell us, generally are. I suppose, if it were otherwise, we should not appreciate Paradise when we get there."

A half-suppressed sneer curled the girl's lip, but the Baronet was, or appeared to be, unconscious of it.

"By the way," he continued, "you spoke of your room. May I inquire whether it pleases you?"

"Charmingly, thank you," responded the girl.

"That is fortunate," said Sir Geoffrey, with a smile. "You are not so difficult to please as Miss Warwick."

The girl started at the name, but controlled herself immediately.

"Indeed?" she said indifferently.

Sir Geoffrey carefully knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Oh," he said, "perhaps I, in the capacity of host, should not have mentioned it. But my vanity is, I will confess, a little piqued. Miss Warwick has expressed some dissatisfaction at her apartments, so I have been compelled to effect an exchange."

The girl was listening now with breathless interest, and the Baronet, stealthily watching her from beneath his brows, saw the rapid changes of the dusky face and played his last card.

"Fortunately," he continued, "the Earl of Deercourt came to my rescue, and offered to place his rooms at the disposal of the lady. So the exchange was effected with less trouble than I had anticipated, since, as you may not be aware, every habitable room in The Grange is at

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present occupied. But this is scarcely an interesting topic." And he lightly turned the conversation into more general channels.

But his words fell unheeded on the girl's ears, and they soon returned to the house and mingled with the guests. But throughout the evening Sir Geoffrey followed the movements of Marie Furness, watching her with lynx-like eyes, for the plan he had conceived depended solely upon her for its success.

At length all the ladies had retired for the night, and most of the gentlemen—among them the Earl of Deercourt—had followed their example.

It was now long past midnight. The drawing-room was deserted and in darkness, and in the billiard-room, three men, tired of play, sat smoking through the early morning hours, and, under the influence of a freely-circulating decanter, conversed in low tones on all conceivable and inconceivable subjects.

These three were Sir Geoffrey himself, Colonel Barnet of the Royal Horse, and Sir Manfred Lewin, K.C., a barrister of considerable renown. They were all three addicted to late hours, and were, therefore, in no hurry to retire.

The door of the billiard-room stood wide open, commanding a view of the stairs. A close observer might have detected an air of restless alertness on the part of Sir Geoffrey, but this passed unnoticed by his two companions.

Suddenly he put his finger to his lips, and, without a word, rapidly extinguished the lights. Then he moved noiselessly over to his companions.

"There's a little comedy going forward upstairs," he whispered. "'For myself, I'm not surprised. Come softly, and see the fun!"

The two men rose, and, without a word, all three crept noiselessly up the dark staircase and peered along the dimly-lit passages above.

Presently they saw the figure of Marie Furness, loosely clad in dressing-gown and slippers, creeping stealthily along in the shadow of the wall. Stooping before the door of the Earl's room, she cautiously turned the handle.

The door yielded, and, with one quick glance of the black eyes around her, she entered the room. The men looked at each other in amusement, expecting to see the door close. But, a moment later, the girl reappeared, and, noiselessly closing the door as before, vanished down the long, dim passage in the direction of her own room.

"Humph!" ejaculated Sir Geoffrey under his breath. "Not so exciting as I had anticipated!" But there was more of exultation than disappointment in his voice.

"She looked anything but amorous," he said grimly.

Sir Manfred looked uneasy.

"Are you sure it's all right?" he said, addressing Sir Geoffrey. "To me, she looked uncommonly like a woman who means mischief!"

Sir Geoffrey smiled reassuringly.

"Not she!" he said whimsically. "The incident is, perhaps, mysterious, but fraught with little danger to any but herself." And he looked meaningly at his companions.

The men laughed, and, separating, retired to their respective apartments.

* * * * *

Dawn was breaking, clear, blue and cloudless, when Lucille Warwick awoke from happy dreams to the happier realities of consciousness.

The Earl of Deercourt—handsome, gay, and debonair, had asked her to be his wife, and she, desiring nothing half so dearly, had consented. For she loved him with all her sweet, gentle heart, and, in her soft, shy, maidenly way, almost worshipped her handsome, light-hearted lover.

She had learnt the art of self-control, and this, together with the modest reserve that was natural to her, made her appear cold and passionless in the eyes of the outer world. But in her heart a well of infinite tenderness ran deep and undiminishing, that made her love well worth the winning.

Suddenly she became aware of a strong odour of escaping gas which permeated the apartment. Leaping lightly out of bed, she examined the brackets in her room, and found them in no way defective.

Then she remembered that the Earl's rooms were directly beneath her own, and a sickening dread of impending danger to the man she loved took possession of her.

Hastily attiring herself, she ran rapidly down the broad stairs, and stopped at the door of her lover's room. All was still within, but a dense, suffocating fume stole through the narrow crevices surrounding the door, and her heart turned sick within her.

Knocking loudly upon the panels, she ran breathlessly to the door of Sir Geoffrey's room, where she repeated her summons. But no response came to her knocking. All was silent.

In an agony of alarm and dread, and scarcely knowing what she did, she began vigorously to beat on all the doors along the passage, calling excitedly for help, and, in a very few minutes, the whole house was astir.

In a few rapid words she communicated her fears to the other guests, and Colonel Barnet, Sir Manfred Lewin, and several others made their way to the door of the Earl's room. Sir Geoffrey now made his appearance, and, learning the nature of their alarm, accompanied them.

Knocking still brought no response, so without further formality the door was flung open. A rush of gaseous vapour made them recoil, but, the next instant they plunged into the room, threw open the high windows, shut off the rapidly escaping gas from the two brackets, both of which had been turned on to their fullest extent, and, with a sickening fear at their hearts, turned towards the bed.

The young Earl lay there, pale and motionlesss. At first they feared he was dead, but among the Baronet's guests was a gentleman who, purely as a hobby, had studied both chemistry and medicine.

After a brief examination the Earl was pronounced to be still alive, though in a very critical condition. Restoratives were immediately applied to the unconscious Earl, and a groom hastily dispatched on horseback for a neighbouring doctor.

It was not until two hours later that the young Earl, feebly opening his eyes, looked about him. He was still too dazed and ill to speak, but his eyes met those of Lucille Warwick, who had begged to be allowed to remain in the room, and a contented smile crept about the mouth, while his eyes closed wearily.

All danger being now at an end, Colonel Barnet and Sir Manfred Lewin, remembering the incident of the preceding night, gravely recalled it to Sir Geoffrey's memory. With his consent, they went in search of Marie Furness. But not a trace of her could they discover anywhere.

She had been seen in the passage when it was first whispered that the young Earl was dead, and one told how she had been seen to reel when she heard it, and go tottering blindly, with shaking limbs, along the passage.

But there inquiry ceased, and Marie Furness, terrible alike in her love and her hate, the dupe of a deeper and more subtle plotter than she, disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed her up.

Slowly—very slowly—the Earl of Deercourt was nursed back to health. As soon as possible he was conveyed to Deercourt Towers, and a fortnight later was on his feet again.

Not a little of his progress towards recovery was due to the loving ministrations of his affianced wife, to whom he owed his rescue from the deadly poison of the escaping gas, and before the year was out a countess' coronet surmounted the gold coils of her hair, and she was happy in the perfect love which her husband bestowed on her.

And Sir Geoffrey Wilde? Baulked in his villainous designs on the life of the Earl of Deercourt, and threatened with ruin which he had not the courage to face, he shot himself on the very day when the marriage of the Earl with Lucille Warwick put an end to all his hopes of succeeding to the title and estates of Deercourt.

Walter J. Mowbray.

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Brought to Book.

Telling of the Unmasking of Two Cardsharpers.

Starting as a gentleman, by force of circumstances a jack of all trades, by profession a *raconteur*. Such was my record when I arrived in London, whither the fame of my stories had preceded me.

Almost directly I received a letter from Herbert Falkner, millionaire, social lion, and otherwise known for his fine stables and genial hospitality, requesting me to do him the honour of a visit to his country place in Derbyshire. It was my fortune to know a man much in his favour and at the time his guest at Whiteacres, the Derbyshire place.

My initial appearance before Mr. Falkner's guests was to be at dinner, and I spent the last moments before leaving my room in reading over the list of topics I had jotted down for use during the evening. A *raconteur* is expected to fill in every lull, every dull moment. Suddenly there fell upon the quiet of my room these words:

"We must run it up to 5,000 to-night! Do you hear? We must."

I stared round the room. It seemed as if the sound had come through some tapestry in a small recess. Perhaps the tapestry covered a secret door, but there was no time to investigate. A footman was waiting to conduct me to my host.

An interesting party was assembled at dinner; that is, they were interesting to me as types of study. As conversationalists they were failures, for the only subjects on which they talked fluently were cards and horseflesh.

I selected my stories accordingly. The guests were apparently familiar with the customs of Monte Carlo and every gaming place abroad, but I told them tales of the Wild West, where I had spent several years in a mining camp, of games of faro and poker that fairly made them gasp, and after dinner they said I must teach them some points in the game of poker.

Sitting opposite to me at the table was a broad-shouldered, dark man, whose eyes, black and set rather closely together, never left my face. His lips were thin and bloodless, and his long, rather aquiline nose had a cruel curve about the nostrils.

But what most attracted my attention was his odd trick of drumming almost constantly with his right hand, now on the table, now on the arm of his chair, and now on his square chin.

The instant he spoke I recognised the voice I had heard in my room. The man was Captain Marchand, a British officer with a French name.

His wife sat at my right, a handsome woman with a profusion of soft brown hair and beautiful blue eyes, which I learnt in a short time were playing havoc with the mental peace of a young fellow named Chadwick. He was a handsome, boyish-looking fellow, one of those chaps who imagine themselves violently in love with every pretty face they meet.

Mrs. Marchand seemed to have caught her husband's peculiar trick of beating that maddening tattoo with her fingers. It fairly got on my nerves, but no one else at the table appeared to notice it.

She had long, slim, nervous-looking hands, covered with rings, the kind of hands one always associates with an artistic temperament, and they were terribly restless. Never for one moment did she keep them still, but played the tattoo with maddening persistency.

During the evening I was kept busy explaining the intricacies of poker, after which I watched the guests yield to the fascination of the game. Soon little piles of silver and gold appeared and disappeared at the various tables. Excitement grew apace.

Finally interest centred at the table where Marchand and young Chadwick played alone. At the beginning the latter won, and with a triumphant gesture hauled in his little pile of gold. The excitement brought a sparkle to his eye and daring to his tongue, and he kept Mrs. Marchand near, declaring that she brought him luck.

When Chadwick won she clapped her hands in girlish glee, and once or twice I caught a cynical smile on Marchand's lips. Clearly her presence was turning Chadwick's head; he played recklessly.

"I'll make it £400!" exclaimed Marchand.

A hush fell on the room. Then rose Mrs. Marchand's clear, sweet voice:

"How exciting! Oh, Mr. Chadwick, go one better. Make it £500."

The other guests rose and gathered round the table. Falkner stood on the hearth-rug, glancing towards the group with troubled eyes. I heard him say under his breath: "The lad can't afford to lose that amount."

I joined the spectators just as Chadwick called for another card. Then I felt a thrill pass over me. The blood rushed to my face, and instinctively I clenched my fist.

Mrs. Marchand was gently tapping the back of Chadwick's chair. Each tap meant that she was telegraphing Chadwick's hand to her husband.

My first impulse was to denounce them then and there. Then came an inspiration. With something of the Captain's cynical smile, I too, began to drum on the back of a chair, and this was what reached the startled couple:

"You—are—caught."

Captain Marchand turned rigid as he grasped the arms of his chair, and for a single instant his eyes met mine. I smiled grimly, enjoying the situation. The turn of events had a different effect on Mrs. Marchand. She fainted away, at which the Captain's composure returned. He sprang to her rescue, and the table was overturned.

When Mrs. Marchand recovered, the guest clamoured for the finish of the game, but Marchand shook his head, perhaps because I drummed a rhythmic warning:

"Don't play!"

Over an hour passed, and I was sitting in my room, cogitating whether I should inform Falkner that he was entertaining a pair of very clever sharpers, when a servant brought me a message from Marchand asking for an interview in his sitting-room.

I found him waiting for me with an ugly scowl on his face; but his wife, pale and with her hair in artistic disarray, was charming in her new *role* of beauty in distress.

Marchand came directly to the point

"Well, what do you intend to do?"

"Nothing," I replied nonchalantly. "It is your game. If you and your charming wife are suddenly summoned to Paris to-morrow the matter ends. Otherwise, I think Mr. Falkner"—I shrugged my shoulders significantly. "And, by the way, it might be just as well if you refunded to Chadwick the money you've won since he's been playing with you."

"And then?"

"And then I shall have one more good after-dinner story to tell when I return to town—that is all. Mr. Falkner shall never know."

"You are very generous. You can have no idea to what straits, we, my husband and I, have been driven."

With a well-simulated sob she buried her head among the pillows.

"'You will pardon Mrs. Marchand's lack of self-control. As you say, I think a trip to Paris is what she needs, what we both need; and I think," he added, with a smile, "we all need something to drink after the events of the evening. Will you join us in a whisky-and-soda? Come, don't say no."

As he spoke he poured out some whisky from a cut-glass decanter and added some soda with perfect coolness and calm. I did not care about drinking with such company, but could think of no reasonable pretext for refusing, so tossed off the whisky-and-soda with a cheerful "Here's luck!" which had an ironical note in it.

I stepped backward towards the door, which he held open. Then, suddenly, I felt my head reeling and a loud singing in my ears.

When I woke it was morning and I was in my own room, fully dressed, lying upon my bed. Dazed and giddy, I tried to collect my thoughts, and at last the remembrance of the previous evening flashed upon me.

I rose and staggered to the room occupied by Captain and Mrs. Marchand, but, as I suspected, the birds had flown and the nest was empty. Taking advantage of the stupor into which the glass of drugged whisky had thrown me, the clever pair had guiltily absconded, leaving no trace behind them.

Our host heard with amazement my tale of their treachery and trickery, but the scandal never became public. And the only reason for the telling of the story is that during a recent trip to Paris, I recognised in one of the reigning stage beauties Mrs. Marchand, who once telegraphed a poker hand to her fellow trickster at Herbert Falkner's country house.

Douglas Doty.

Not the Only Pebble.

The Love Story of an Everyday Young Man.

"Are you really going to leave us, Grace?"

John Branscombe asked the question in an unsteady voice, and deep anxiety was clearly discernible on his countenance. He was not what people would call a handsome young man; his face attracted by its sterling honesty rather than by its physical beauty.

He was twenty-one, tall, broad-shouldered, and strongly-built; his whole appearance denoted steady perseverance—"plodding," as some would call it—and not the smartness and dash which invariably attracts although it may not always be so reliable as the characteristic possessed by John Branscombe.

Grace Ashurst was seventeen. She was tantalisingly pretty, and gave promise of great beauty as she developed into a woman. She was vivacious, quick in all her movements, with rosy lips and eyes that were constantly changing in expression.

When she assumed a demure air, she was more bewitching than ever, and even when she was angry she only made herself more lovable.

John Branscombe had aroused her anger on more than one occasion by adopting a protective attitude; her flashing eyes abashed him, but the outburst only added fuel to the flame of his love. "I want you, I want you!" he would say to himself, apostrophising the absent Grace; she half-realised that he was in love with her, but her mind was occupied with other thoughts, and she smiled at the thought.

"He would never do for me!" she declared to herself. "I want a man with more—more—oh, more soul! John is too ordinary for me!"

She was going to leave the northern town and take up her abode in the Metropolis for the purpose of receiving a thorough musical education. She had a good voice and the idea of becoming a *prima donna* enchanted her. She had urged her mother to permit this, and finally Mrs. Ashurst had consented, much against her own inclination.

"It would be better for you to settle down here, using your gift (as you could do) for the amelioration of the lot of those less fortunate," said the widow. "Nevertheless, as you seem to have set your heart on it, I will consent."

Her lips moved as though she were saying more, and Grace guessed what was passing in her mind.

"Don't think me ungrateful, mamma!" she implored. "I am consumed by this desire! I do not wish to leave you alone, but you can come to London, too, and we can be happy together!"

"Never mind, dear!" said the self-sacrificing mother, her own feelings driven aside by her love for her daughter. "I will stay here, and you must write often and come to see me as frequently as you can!"

So it was arranged, and John Branscombe learnt of the plan only on the evening preceding Grace's departure

"Are you really going to leave us?" John repeated the question as Grace did not reply.

She was gazing at him with mingled amusement and vexation. What did it matter to him? What right had he to speak in a tone that signified reproach?

"Why should I not?" she asked defiantly.

John was nonplussed. He scarcely dared to suggest that he had some claim to consideration, so he thought of saying that she ought to study her mother's happiness. He remembered, just in time, that this was not a fair remark to make; it was to be assumed that mother and daughter had agreed, and, moreover, it was not a straightforward answer. He was confused and remained silent. Grace laughed teasingly.

"Dumb!" she said triumphantly. "Now, please do not patronise me any more! Yes, I am going away to-morrow, so I shall say 'Good-bye!' to you this evening, Mr. Branscombe, and I shall not see you again for some time. During that period, you will recognise that the fact that we went to school together does not give you the right to act as guardian for ever——"

"I wish it did!" interrupted Branscombe eagerly and earnestly. "You want someone to protect you, Grace! Life is full of dangers and troubles and"—he was trembling with suppressed passion—"and I could guard you, I could devote myself to you."

"But I do not require your assistance, Mr. Branscombe!"

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she retorted stiffly. "I think I can manage without you!"

If he had been better versed in the subject of love, he would not have made the false step that followed; but he could only see that Grace was going away, that she would meet with men of more fascinating exterior, that she might be attracted to one of these, who would not make it his life's work to secure her happiness. And, above all, he saw her slipping from him, and the thought of life without Grace was intolerable!

"Yes, Grace, you do want me!" he said. It was a mixture of pleading and an effort to convince her that she would be happier with him than with anyone, because he would slave to make her happy. But Grace heard the words without understanding the feelings that prompted them. "You will want me, Grace! You must not go from me!"

"Stop! stop!" she commanded, drawing her small, but exquisitely-moulded figure to its full height. "You are presuming, Mr. Branscombe! You appear to be suffering under the illusion that you are the only pebble on the beach!"

To anyone possessing full knowledge of the circumstances, that speech would have sounded unkind, to say the least; but Grace did not understand, so it was justifiable. To John Branscombe it was a just rebuke for his presumption; he recognised that his emotion had carried him too far. He flushed with shame.

"I beg your pardon!" he said humbly. "I ought to have remembered! Yes, there are others! But—oh, Grace! —they will not love you more than I do!"

He shut his teeth hard in an endeavour to repress the signs of emotion, but without avail. To hide the tears that welled to his eyes, this strong man turned hurriedly, with a farewell wave of his hand, and left the room. Grace caught sight of his face for a second and it banished all resentment from her breast.

"But, really, you know, I am not in love with him!" she remarked apologetically to the walls, and then resolutely shut him from her thoughts.

Mrs. Ashurst would have lived with Grace in London had the state of her health permitted, but the doctor forebade it. She, therefore, took measures to secure the services of an old school friend, and it was in the family of this friend that Grace lived. Thus assured of her daughter's welfare, Mrs. Ashurst made herself contented. She had an income from shares which more than sufficed to keep her and Grace and for the payment of the cost of Grace's musical education.

It was not till she returned for a holiday visit that Grace learnt of the removal of John Branscombe; he had left the place soon after her departure.

"It is said that he has gone abroad," said her mother. "Of course he is possessed of sufficient means to enable him to live a bachelor life without work, so he can reside where he likes."

Grace felt a trifle sorry at the loss of John; it would have been pleasant to see him as a friend; but she soon threw off that feeling.

"It was so foolish of him!" she laughed when she was alone, as she surveyed herself in the mirror. "It served him right that I should tell him that he was not the only pebble on the beach! Yet—he was not a bad sort!"

Then her mind reverted to one or two handsome men who had already paid her marked attention, and her vanity was gratified.

"I shouldn't think of marriage for a long time!" she declared, shaking her head slowly at her own reflection. "I want to make a name, and then—then I can have my choice! It would be nice to have a title!"

She went back to her studies. A year passed away, and Grace heard from her mother a story that showed how nearly she had lost the chance of continuing her education.

"The company in which I was so largely interested," explained Mrs. Ashurst, "failed irretrievably. I was almost killed by the announcement! But Fortune favoured me this time. It seems that my solicitors had guessed something of the kind and had exchanged my shares some time ago. Consequently the failure did not affect us to any extent, and the dividends come as usual; not quite so much, but enough for all purposes!"

"How fortunate!" cried Grace, the colour returning to the cheeks which had blanched at Mrs. Ashurst's first words.

"Exceedingly!" exclaimed her mother in a tone which indicated great thankfulness. "I wrote to express my gratitude, but they said they were pleased to have helped a client and that I had better not say anything about it. I don't quite understand shares and all that sort of thing, so I gave up the attempt to explain to myself how they had managed it."

"I suppose it is all right?" queried Grace, in a wavering tone. "I suppose they hadn't sold the shares long ago and are just paying you the dividend till they abscond or something like that?"

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Ashurst was very decisive. "I would not think of such a thing for a single instant! Mr. Dane owed your father a debt of gratitude, and he is as honest as the day!"

"Have you heard anything of Mr. Branscombe?" asked Grace, a little later. The return to home always awakened the memory of John.

"Nothing whatever!" said Mrs. Ashurst. "He has disappeared completely. In the Colonies, I expect!"

That was rather vague, but Grace accepted it without question. Perhaps he was married? Grace started and frowned as the thought flashed across her mind. Yes, perhaps he was married—why not?

"If so," murmured Grace, "he is probably saying about me what I said to him! He has discovered another pebble!"

It was no concern of hers, but she did not find the reflection very pleasant. It is so natural to want things all one's own way!

The next four years were busy ones for Grace Ashurst; she had developed a magnificent voice, and, at the end of that period, she had made her first public appearance at a small concert with great success.

Her fame spread, people wanted to hear her. Everybody, that is, everybody who cared for music, desired to hear this young singer who promised to rival Patti and glorify Great Britain by the fact that a native-born woman had arisen to assume a place and take the laurels that have so often fallen to natives of other countries!

She appeared in the Metropolis and carried the great city by storm. Newspaper critics were unanimous in their praises; her success was assured. Engagements poured in upon her, all Society was at her feet. Grace Ashurst's triumph was complete!

It was not long before rumours of offers of marriage from possessors of proud titles, and prospective possessors of such titles, were circulated. It is small wonder that Grace felt elated; the stream of success and the halo of the fame were sufficient to produce exultation in one much older than this beautiful woman with the glorious voice!

Grace Ashurst was preparing for a great night, and at its conclusion she was to be the guest, at supper, of a wealthy gentleman, well known for his love of music. It was to be a select gathering; the host and his wife and daughters, with Viscount Critton and a few more chosen members of Society.

The supper was, in point of fact, due to the request of the Viscount, who had induced his friend, the host, to invite the new singer in order that he (the Viscount), might have the quiet opportunity he desired.

The host knew quite well that there would be a proposal of marriage, and Grace herself anticipated it instinctively. She knew but little of the Viscount, but she was prepossessed in his favour and he bore a good reputation. The title had its glamour for her, but she had retained sufficient mastery of herself not to be led away merely by a name.

"I like him!" she told herself. "Love will come afterwards! I do not know that there is anyone whom I like better!"

It was natural that her thoughts should revert to John Branscombe, but it was so long since she had heard of him that the memory of his sterling qualities was dimmed

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"I might really have fallen in love with him if he had been more—more dashing, just a little more!" she said meditatively. "He was rather humdrum! He might have been more polished if he had moved in Society. But that's all over now!"

And again her thoughts turned to the Viscount.

Almost at the very moment that Grace was thus communing with herself, the object of that communion was having a heated discussion with Mr. Dane, the solicitor.

"My dear man!" expostulated the solicitor testily. "I cannot keep the farce on any longer! It was perfectly understood between us that the money would secure an annuity for just so long. The time is up and the object is attained. Now the truth must be told! The next payment is due and there is no money forthcoming! The farce about the dividends really ended, or ought to have ended, six months ago! It is hardly fair to her to allow her to think that all is well, right down to the last moment!"

"I know it is not!" said Branscombe moodily. "But it must be kept up for a few days, and by that time an engagement will be announced and Grace Ashurst will be settled! You must keep it up, Mr. Dane, out of friendship for me and Mrs. Ashurst!"

Mr. Dane groaned.

"I consider that I have forfeited my reputation by agreeing to this thing, and that is rather a large price to pay for friendship, young man!" he returned. "No! I must tell her! Grace is able to earn a large sum now, and her personal circumstances will make no difference to Viscount Critton, if he is the chosen man!"

"It might make a difference if he knew!" said Branscombe. "Well, if you must tell, you must keep names quiet for the present! So much is certain! Don't tell her for two days," he pleaded.

"I shall tell her to-morrow!" retorted Mr. Dane decisively.

"Then you will not mention my name yet? That much you must promise, and I insist! What difference will that make? Well, it might upset the prospective wedding and I don't want to do that! Oh, I can't explain how!"

Either Mr. Dane could not or would not see the drift of Branscombe's reasoning; at any rate, his face remained somewhat wooden in aspect.

"I'm going to see her to-night for the last time!" said John Branscombe, as he made his way to the railway station. "My work during the past four years as a journalist will serve me in good stead. I can get at the side and watch her at close range. I cannot take a seat in front, as I have done before. I am too far off, and if I get near—in the stalls—she will recognise me. A last look at the woman I love and then away from this country for good! She will be happy, and what more ought I to want? I desire her happiness! I should like to share it, but if the Fates forbid?"

As Grace Ashurst stood before the enthusiastic audience that evening, she did not dream that John Branscombe stood so near her, feasting his eyes upon her, drinking in the last drops of happiness and striving to banish the dull pain at his heart!

She was compelled to respond to a rapturous encore. She was holding the large audience entranced by her pathetic rendering of an old Scottish air, when something terrorised the entire mass of men and women. From the flies there came a burning mass of flimsy material, falling directly over the singer! It would envelop her in its fiery embrace, the awful consequences of which flashed into the minds of all and held them paralysed!

Grace, carried away by her desire to exceed all her previous efforts, did not notice the look that appeared in the faces of those in front of her, and she stood there with the burning mass falling upon her without being in the least conscious of the terrible fate that threatened her. It was all so momentary that no one could call out.

There was one person who saw the danger and was cool and quick enough to act; it was John Branscombe. He darted forward from the side and pushed Grace towards a side box with a suddenness that sent her reeling. Before she could recover from her amazement, the house was in an uproar.

John had saved her from a dreadful catastrophe; for, had the blazing mass enveloped her, the soft material of her dress would have caught and she would have been doomed; but in saving her, he had brought disaster upon himself. The flaming mass fell upon him before he could get out of line; it covered him and, notwithstanding his endeavours to free himself, it burnt him and caught portions of his clothing.

Assistance was promptly forthcoming; three or four men from the wings rushed on the stage and helped him. In the auditorium a panic ensued, but happily it was quieted before anyone suffered serious injury.

A doctor was called and he ordered the removal of the now unconscious Branscombe to a hospital; but Grace, who had recovered from the shock, insisted that the unfortunate man should be taken to the house of the family with whom she still resided. "He saved me," she said simply, "and I will do my best for him!"

It was not till the following morning, when she was permitted to see the patient, that she recognised John Branscombe, somewhat changed but John all the same.

"John!" she exclaimed involuntarily. "It was *you*?"

"Yes!" he said. He could not venture to utter more; he averted his eyes lest she should see the love that *would* come into them.

He was not badly injured; his hands were burnt, his hair and beard were gone, and there was a burn on his right cheek.

"I am a pretty object for her to gaze upon!" he thought. Yet he exulted in it. He had saved her!

"I owe you my life, John!" she said with quivering lips, placing her soft hand on his left cheek.

"Oh, no! Not so bad as that!" he responded cheerfully. "I chanced to be in the way, you see!"

"How was it that you were so near?"

"I wished to see you for the last time!" he replied, with averted eyes.

Then the doctor came in and stopped the conversation; the patient was becoming excited, he said.

Later in the day, Mrs. Ashurst arrived in a state of great nervous strain. Mr. Dane had told her about the dividends and she had heard of the affair of the previous evening.

Her outpouring was so incoherent that Grace could not grasp it at first, but the elder lady grew calmer when she was quite assured that her daughter was safe, and told the other story more plainly.

"So it comes to this. That you really lost all in that failure after all, mother, and that John Branscombe gave all he had to buy you an allowance that would last long enough to enable me to complete my education, and he persuaded Mr. Dane to help him! He wanted to keep his name secret still, but Mr. Dane has told you all. Is that it?"

"Exactly, my dear! And now you must help me to repay him. He has given up all and worked, so that you might not suffer; you must now work to help him and repay him!"

"I will try to repay him, mother, if he will let me! It was he who saved me last night!"

Grace said nothing to John till he was well enough to get about; then she went up to him and held out her hands.

"I know all!" she said. "What can I do to repay you?"

John trembled; he could not reply for a moment; then he said, with a sigh:

"I could tell you!" he cried, "if I—if I were not so painfully conscious that I am only one insignificant pebble among so many better!"

"Don't!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears, her cheeks crimson. "I am sorry that I ever said that! I did not understand!"

He stared at her, doubted if he heard and saw aright; but he could not mistake. He strode towards her and clasped her to his breast.

"Do you mean that, Grace?" he asked fiercely.

"Yes, John! I know now that, for me, you are the only pebble!"

F. Brewster.

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES."

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR ... Birmingham.

SECOND LIST.

13. AGNIW	**19. ABDDFORR** .....
14. AFIKKLR	**20. AEIKLLNRY** .....
15. HIILLLLM	**21. DEEFFHILS** .....
16. EHPRT	**22. ADEHHLOY** .....
17. ACEEHMNRST	**23. CEKORS** .....
18. ABCMNRW	**24. AHMORTUY** .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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THE WEDMORE'S "HOP."

A Tale of a Misunderstanding which was Cleared up.

"My dear, they are as good as engaged; they always were together even before Gertie was in her teens; and two years ago, when she was sixteen, there was a tremendous row. Miss Fox, in her usual amiable way, congratulated both Colonel Moray and Mrs. Clive on the engagement.

"Of course the result was astonishment, indignation, Percy and Gertie called up to judgment, vows of eternal constancy, Gertie sent to school for six months; and ever since then, whenever Harry has been over here, six 'rounds' together at every hop, and all the squares sat out in the garden, whether Mrs. Clive liked it or not. I suppose, now Percy has this money left to him, it will be all right."

So spoke Miss May Faulkner, a Jersey belle, aged twenty, to her companion, Clare Grattan, a girl two years her senior, who had come from England on a visit to the Clives above-mentioned.

The girls were strolling slowly along the St. Helier's broad white sands; they were lagging rather behind the rest of their party, which had split itself up into two other couples.

Clare Grattan's heart was heavy with a dull oppression of pain, the result of a fear become a reality, as she answered:

"Then you think Mr. Moray"—there was a momentary pause before she spoke this name—"and Gertie care for one another?"

"Think so? Look there!"

As May spoke, she pointed to the figures of a young girl and man who were standing almost at the water's edge, their outlines sharply defined against the sunset glow. Their faces were turned towards the sea, away from Clare; but she, looking at the young man's bent head, the girl's upturned one, could fancy only too well the look of Percival Moray's brown eyes. Had she not known it to her own cost?

She had been a fool, she thought, and only that afternoon had been happy in her folly. Clare Grattan had only been six weeks at Jersey, but that time had been fuller and more intense to her than all the years of her yet early womanhood; she had learnt that her own heart at length had grown into love. For the last month she had found herself, whenever she was at a dance, waiting with a feverish impatience for the advent of a tall, slight figure with a bright, honest face, the charm of which it was difficult to analyse, but impossible not to feel.

She had listened every morning, as she sat in the breakfast-room with Gertie, for a cheerful voice calling them from the garden below, and begging them to come out for a practice at lawn-tennis; and she had felt a new, intense pleasure in the rare talks, in which Percival seemed to show her glimpses of that other "soul side" which a man "keeps to show a woman when he loves her." He suited her as no one else had ever done, and she had fancied that he wished to let her know that he loved her.

And yet she had feared sometimes—and, as it had proved, had had reasons for her fears—that Gertie and Percival had loved one another; and how, thought Clare now, could any girl who had once cared for Percival Moray become indifferent to him?

Clare was still pondering, when Gertie turned her steps towards her friends.

"Do you know it is nearly seven o'clock, Clare? We shall have a nice scolding from mamma if we are late for dinner, and we promised to be at the Wedmores' by a quarter to nine."

Clare smiled faintly.

"How horribly fagged you do look! Not at all like dancing. These last three nights have been too much for you."

"Are you tired?" asked Percy of Miss Grattan, bending towards her.

If he had only known the sharp thrill of pain the tone of his voice caused her! She was glad to hear her own sound unconstrained as she answered:

"Not at all, thank you."

"We have come too far along the sands; I ought to have remembered. Won't you take my arm?"

"Oh, no; I am all right."

He said no more, but, turning again to Gertie, called out to two other individuals who had apparently forgotten everything else in the contemplation of a dead star-fish; at all events, they had been gazing at it for full five minutes, when Percy's voice reached them.

"Hullo, Rashton! Come on, it's getting late."

Thus addressed, the two defaulters moved slowly towards the rest of the little group. Their conversation, as they strolled along, was after this wise:

"Be a brick, Miss Wedmore, and try to give a miserable wretch a chance."

"How can I? I can't make Gertie like you."

"Keep that fellow Moray out of the way, so that I may try my luck at least."

"You're doing your very best to ruin it by seeming to flirt with me. Gertie is awfully jealous, mind."

"Hang it! I beg your pardon, I mean——"

"You needn't, I don't mind it."

"I think I have most reason for jealousy. Why, I know that she and Moray were spoons once, even if they are not now."

"Yes, but Gertie can't know that I am only playing confidante."

"Never you mind; only help me, and you shall see what the bridesmaids' lockets will be like."

"For shame, Captain Rashton! bribery and corruption. By the way, I have a weakness for opals."

"I'll make a note of that," answered Captain Rashton, taking out his pocket-book for the purpose.

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Certainly, to an uninitiated eye, the two had decidedly as much the appearance of flirting as Percival and Gertie had, and a keen observer might have connected that fact with the wrathful flash of Miss Clive's blue eyes, and her sharp, petulant answers when addressed.

Clare did not do so, but imagined that these signs of ill-temper in her friend were owing to some fault of Percy, and inwardly determined, now that she knew of the understanding between Mr. Moray and Gertie, to abstain even from any appearance of intimacy with the former, lest it should wound her friend, whom she knew was a little inclined to be exacting.

"She needn't be afraid, though," thought poor Clare to herself. "I know he is true. If he loved me, I would trust him entirely."

The party broke up at the top of King Street, Florence Wedmore going one way, and the three other girls in the opposite direction.

"Good-bye for an hour and a half," said Florence. "Captain Rashton and Percy, you are to come back home with me and give the floors a last polish."

If Gertie's face could be said to be dark at any time, it certainly was, as she with Clare and May turned towards that quarter of St. Helier's popularly known as "the Shingles."

"What a flirt Florence is!" she remarked, with virtuous indignation.

"'People who live in glass houses,'" answered May. "The idea of you accusing anyone of flirting, Gertie, is rather too fine, considering the way you have always treated Percy."

"Percy and I understand one another," answered Gertie curtly.

"That is a comfort, at all events," retorted May, "for nobody else does. Well, here is our house, so ta-ta for the present."

Two minutes more, and Clare and Gertie reached the latter's home, called the Retreat, apparently because it faced the road.

The dinner that evening at the above-mentioned abode was not very cheerful. Gertie was cross, Clare occupied by her bitter thoughts of what she had learnt that afternoon, and Mrs. Clive, Gertie's mother (Miss Clive was an only child), found it very hard work to maintain anything like conversation.

Directly it was ended Gertie ran up to her room to dress for that evening's dance at the Wedmores'. She was standing in her white wrapper by the toilet-table unfastening the twisted rope of her pretty hair, which shone like gold in the still lingering afterlight, when her eye fell on a half-withered bouquet of passion-flower, ferns, and tuberoses, which was placed in a glass of water on the table.

Some memory connected with it made her cheeks flush, her brain throb, her eyes burn with stinging tears, which she tried to force back by hard biting of her underlip.

"So," she thought, "he neglects me and flirts with Florence! Very well, sir, tit for tat. I'll revenge myself with Percy, and if I don't make you suffer—that's all!"

Meanwhile Clare, in her room above, was trying to convince herself against her heart's assurance that Percy did not love her, and that if he did (illogical but girlish sequence), it was her duty to Gertie to reject his affection, and bid him render it to her to whom it was due.

She would be loyal to her friend at all costs to herself.

A light tap at the door, and Gertie entered, looking very pretty in a soft white silk much smothered with lace.

"How shall I do, Clare?"

"I never saw you look so well," said Miss Grattan, and she spoke the truth. Gertie's eyes were shining like bits of sunlit summer sea; her cheeks were a delicate crimson, her fair hair was ruffled in that sweet order of disorder which best suits a Greuze face and low white brow.

"Will you put in my flowers?" said Gertie, holding up the great pink bells of the belladonna lily for Clare to fasten in her hair.

"Thank you, dear," as it was accomplished, and the little lady pirouetted round, humming a waltz in a manner which caused Clare to exclaim:

"Gertie, are you bewitched? What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Gertie, then with a sudden faltering of her voice and a burst of tears, "Oh, Clare, I am so unhappy!"

Clare put her arms round her and let her sob for a few moments in silence, then she spoke:

"I am very sorry; but, Gertie, you needn't be afraid; I am sure he cares for you." Her words were very brave, and her lips did not tremble as she spoke.

"Look there," and as May spoke she pointed to two figures standing at the water's edge.

"Do you think so?" and Gertie lifted her head from where it had rested on her friend's breast. "But why does he flirt so? I am proud, and don't show it, but it pains me dreadfully, Clare. I feel sometimes as if— Oh, why should he hurt me when I love him?"

"Is she trying not to ask me to flirt with him?" thought Gertie's friend, and the hot glow of a wounded pride, far deeper and stronger than that of the younger girl, burnt her pale cheek at the idea that she, Clare Grattan, should be suspected of flirting. It was some little time before she slowly answered:

"I should trust him and be sure he deserves it; and, Gertie"—she spoke nervously and as if frightened lest her friend should be offended—"I wouldn't give him any cause for jealousy by being too much to-night with——"

"There's the carriage," said Gertie, springing up. "I'm very sorry, dear, I can't take your advice, as it's the exact opposite to what I mean to do. I shall treat him just as he treats me."

With which words Miss Clive ran downstairs, and Clare had no opportunity for saying more.

"How good of you to be early!" exclaimed Florence Wedmore, entering the cloak-room as Clare and Gertie were disencumbering themselves of their wraps. "I've put you down to play two waltzes, Gertie, and Miss Grattan for one."

"Oh, I will play as often as you like," said Clare. "I am rather tired, and don't want to dance much."

Florence shook her head.

"I won't victimise you," she said. "Ah, there's the first waltz beginning. I put down Miss Fox for that; she always plays the *Faust*, and thumps so. It's as well to get her performance over before many people come."

Clare sat down at the piano. She was dressed in a simply-

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made dress, unflounced and untortured by fashion, of soft silk, the colour of the outer leaves of the daffodil, which deepened in the folds of the drapery, with subtle gradations of shade.

In her black hair were set two or three stephanotis stars; the outline of her face was calm and fair—Percy—who had eyes for her alone—thought sad. The heavy-lidded grey eyes were not fixed on her music; her hands moved mechanically.

How different she was from other women! How unlike her dress, her face, her words, to anything he had ever known! He was twenty-seven, and he loved her, loved her, loved her—the words formed themselves to the rhythm of the passionate German waltz she was playing. He wished that he and she were waltzing to it. Anyhow, he would do the next best thing—ask her for the following dance.

Alas, before he could move to her, the waltz ended. Clare was monopolised by another man, to whom Florence introduced her; and Harry himself was discovered by Miss Wedmore, who insisted on introducing him to a red-haired heiress, who smiled sweetly, as she hoped Mr. Moray did not mind dancing polka time—she did not dance anything else.

Percival Moray was a lieutenant of Hussars, whose father lived in Jersey. The boy himself, when a child, became a favourite with his mother's brother, who proclaimed him as his heir, petted him as a child, sent him to Eton, bought him his commission, only asking in return that he should spend half his holidays and leaves with him; and who had died a twelvemonth ago, leaving Percy two thousand a year, and a pretty old house in Kent.

So two months before this evening Moray sold out and came over to Jersey to win his old love; when, to his great disgust, he discovered that he no longer cared for her, nor she for him. Still they went on playing at love till Clare Grattan came on a visit to the Clives, and Percy fell honestly and heartily in love with her.

Nevertheless, he felt he was, in a manner, bound to marry Gertie if she wished it—and it was hardly likely, he thought, that she did not; for the girl was full of wounded pride and indignation against the man she loved, and held the sweet jest up by dancing, talking, and flirting with Percy so desperately, that she deceived both him and Captain Rashton into the idea that she was in love with the former.

It was fully half an hour before Percy was able to gain Clare's side and ask for "the dance you promised me."

She knew it would be far more marked if she refused, so took his arm as the first bars of the waltz sounded.

Clare was fond of waltzing, and Percy's long swinging, yet perfectly smooth, step suited her better than any other. She could not help enjoying the swift motion.

The last slow chords sounded, and they stopped.

"Ah," said Percy, drawing a long breath, "it's warm."

"It is," assented Clare.

"But the garden is cool," said Percy.

"So people seem to think," she answered, laughing.

For everyone had poured out from the ballroom to the cool night air, and white dresses glimmered dimly among the trees on the small lawn.

"They have placed the refreshment table out there," said the young man. "Don't you want some claret-cup?"

The want was supplied, and they sat down on a rustic seat near the table. The lawn seemed nearly as full as the dancing-room had been a few minutes before; and Clare watched Gertie, as she saw her evidently engaged in a furious flirtation with a man whom she knew Percy disliked.

"She must do it to vex him," Clare thought, quite ignorant that Gertie had not once thought of Mr. Moray this evening.

From the verandah sounded the warning bars of a galop, and the lawn began to be deserted. Clare would have risen, but Percy stopped her.

"Don't go yet," he said; "at least, if you are not engaged for this."

"But I am."

"Then let your partner find you."

"No, I really must go. I want——"

"Oh, I know what you want—to avoid me."

"Mr. Moray!"

"I beg your pardon if I am rude; but how have I offended you?"

"You have not."

"Then why do you always try to escape speaking to me? What have I done?"

"Nothing. I——"

"Why do you stop? Oh, Clare, Clare! don't you know that I love you?"

There was silence. For one moment a great pulse of joy throbbed through the girl's whole being; and then came the sickening remembrance of Gertie.

"You must know it," the young man said passionately. "You must have seen! And I thought—Clare, can't you love me?"

There was no one else near to hear the heavily-whispered "No."

"Then what made me think? for I did think—Clare, you are not a flirt like these girls here. Why were you so kind if you never meant to have me? Why did you let me imagine it?"

She could only say, "I beg your pardon," humbly.

"Why should you? Only look straight at me and say, 'I do not love you,' and I will leave you; but not till then."

She could not tell that lie to him who trusted her; as yet she did not wish to betray her real reason and Gertie's pride.

"You don't speak; you do care for me! I knew it, my Clare!"

He would have taken her hand; but she withdrew it.

"How about Gertie?" she said quietly. "Are you not engaged?"

He did not answer for a moment; then said:

"Is that childish bond to stand between you and me? Clare, Gertie and I are nothing to each other now; we have outgrown our fancy long ago."

"You may have; she has not. Percy, if I trust you with her heart secret, respect it. She loves you, and all her gaiety is put on to hide her pain at your neglect. Oh, think how base I must feel—her friend whom she trusted—to let you speak so to me!"

"*You* base! *You*, Clare darling! I've been a thoughtless brute; and I see it now. Forgive me!"

"Yes."

"And love me?"

He spoke timidly, as knowing he would be denied. Her answer came very low.

"I shall have to learn not to do so."

"Then you do?" he said quickly.

"I cannot help it;" and there was the break of a sob in her voice.

"And you ask me to give you up, knowing that? To win my Heaven on earth, and turn away from it? Clare, you cannot."

"I must;" and the bitter agony of the tone only showed the firmness of her resolve. "Percy, you are honourable; don't make me despise you, as I should if you were false to Gertie."

"But, Clare, I love you, not Gertie."

"She loves you," Clare answered, with the sublime unreasonableness of a woman. "And right is right, though it is hard—Oh, so hard!"

"It is something to hear you say that it is hard," he answered, in a smothered tone. "But you don't know how cruel you are to me, or how you have grown into my life. I never meant to love; but this evening when I saw you I felt I must speak and know if you——"

She laid her hand on his.

"And you have made it all the harder for me," he said. "If I had still thought you did not care for me, I might have turned to Gertie; but now——"

"You will do what is right," she answered, while the tears would spring to her eyes.

"Right! Is it right to marry a girl I do not love?"

"You will learn to do so; she is so sweet, you cannot help it."

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"Cannot I? Clare, your face is the one face for me on earth; you the one woman."

She rose, blindly, nobly wrong in her self-denial.

"I cannot listen to more," she said, in a choked voice; to her own heart she added, "I dare not."

"Clare!" He rose and caught her wrists. There was no one to see; the garden was again dark and silent, except where the light streamed through the verandah. "I only want to say good-bye."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think I could go on as I am doing now—see you for the next month every day, and know that you love me, and that you will never be more to me than now? It would drive me mad. No; I shall leave here by to-morrow's boat."

"But, Percy——"

"You need not think that," he said, with a sudden fierce burst of anger; "if she and I were alone on this earth, I would never now marry Gertie. You have done her no good—or, rather, no harm. Dear little thing, she deserves a better fate than a husband who does not care for her."

There was a silence; then Percy spoke again, his voice strangely humble and gentle:

"One kiss, Clare, for our good-bye; only one, my dear."

"No," she said; and her tone was both stern and surprised.

He said no more; side by side they returned to the house. Clare's heart was full with the unutterable longing to turn to the man beside her and say, "Stay;" Percy's with a wild turmoil of anger and love. He felt dimly that his love gave him a right over Clare; that her power, "woman-like to weave sweet words," had been exerted wrongly; that her sacrifice was a needless one, which would mar both their lives and for no good.

A hard grasp of her hand, a low spoken good-bye in answer to her whispered "Forgive me," and he was gone.

A hard grasp of her hand, a low spoken good-bye in answer to her whispered "Forgive me!" and he was gone. When would she see him again? Dizzy and faint with dull misery, she sat down in the verandah.

"I think this is our dance?"

The voice woke her up, and she saw standing by her a tall man with a puffy, foolish, good-natured face.

"I am so very tired," she answered; "will you excuse me?"

"Certainly. You look faint, Miss Grattan; may I get you a glass of water?"

"If you will be so kind."

The water did her good; she steadied her nerves, and gazed in through the open window at the dancers. She saw Gertie, glowing and radiant, the prettiest girl in the room, waltzing with Captain Rashton, looking utterly happy, careless and contented.

For one moment Clare felt a bitter anger against this girl, for whose sake she had given up the supreme beauty and joy of life, and who would never know it.

What did Gertie need more than she had at the present moment? Seemingly nothing; and yet Clare remembered the childish tempest of sorrow she had witnessed a few hours ago, and was glad she had been loyal to her friend, even though at so dear a price.

The dance was over. The two girls climbed rather wearily up the bedroom stairs of the Retreat.

"Come in here, Clare," said Gertie, as they reached the latter's door.

Clare's wearied eyes looked piteously at her friend, as her lips repeated for the third time that evening the excuse, "I am so tired."

"Only for a minute, dear." Gertie drew her in, and shut the door, then said: "You were right."

"What do you mean?" asked Clare, stupidly amazed.

"He loves me," said Gertie, pressing her small hands close against the faded pink lilies on her breast; "he always has, and I was only a little fool to think he was flirting with Florence."

"Ho! Who?"

"Robert—I mean Captain Rashton. Clare, are you ill?"

For Clare's face was white, her eyes closed, the heavily-cut lips closed together.

"No, Gertie; I am quite well. But I don't understand. Don't you love Per—Mr. Moray?"

"Love Percy! I left off doing so more than a year ago. I've quite ceased to care for him. I only used him as a decoy-duck to draw Robert on."

"And in doing so may have unknowingly wrought evil to two people," thought poor Clare.

Percy was to leave Jersey on the morrow; she might never see him again; he might go abroad, and never hear of the real state of things.

But she remembered it was hardly likely that a man possessing both relations and friends in Jersey would not hear very quickly of his old love's engagement to another man; and she wished Gertie happiness very warmly, and was glad in her gladness, staying with her more than half an hour, listening to her diatribes about Captain Rashton.

She was glad to be alone, though, in her own room; alone, free to thank God for the great happiness which yet might be hers.

And was; for less than a fortnight later Clare was stand-

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ing under the shade of a tall, flowering myrtle, the aromatic scent of which filled the autumn air with bitter sweetness. Percy was by her, very gravely contented, and on her left hand was the shimmer of a sapphire ring she had only worn a week.

"You came back very quickly," she said. "Were you afraid I should forget you?"

"I wanted to be sure," he answered.

"You needn't have been afraid," and her face glowed a little. "Percy?"

"Clare?"

"Do you know I almost think I was in the wrong that night."

"I am sure you were."

She laughed, but her tone was grave as she said:

"Are you angry with me?"

"Angry with you for showing how strong you were to do what seemed right to you? You must think me a brute, Clare!"

"It seemed to tear my heart out to have to deny you; and I see I was wrong now."

"So do I; but I am not sorry for it, Clare, for it taught me"—he drew her closer to him as he spoke—"how far above myself is the woman I love. **T. P. C. Redford.**

CHANGING THE PLOT.

Telling of an Editor, a Writer, and a Story.

The publisher of fiction in paper covers was not feeling very amiable when the young lady novelist called on him.

"I called to see about my story," said the young lady novelist.

"Oh, the one which is entitled 'Marietta's Marriage; or, a Life Story from a Book of Cigarette Papers.'"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, it's a pretty good novel. But you must bear in mind that as litterateurs we're responsible for the education of the public to a certain degree. We must not be too improbable. Sometimes you have to be a little improbable now and then in order to fascinate your reader, but you can be reasonable a good deal of the time."

"But if you try that, isn't your reader likely to become unfascinated?" she inquired.

"Not if you're judicious. Now, the only objection I have to your story is the incident which represents the heroine as jumping out of a third storey window on to an awning over a butcher's shop in order to escape the abductors who are on her track. It's too much to risk on an awning.

"And besides, it's more than likely any abductor who knew his business would have a confederate posted outside to catch her when she bounced off. Of course, you've got her cornered, and she's got to get away somehow. But I must say it doesn't sound quite artistic to me."

She had been thinking while he talked, and she remarked:

"Suppose we arrange it this way: She was on her way home from the milliner's, where she bought the most fashionable hat in the window. She was walking through the park when she saw her pursuers on her track.

"Without a moment's hesitation she took off the hat, laid it on the ground, and then crouched behind the bunch of mammoth hyacinth blossoms which the milliner had told her would cost two guineas extra. How she rejoiced that she had not carried out her threat to go without, rather than pay so much.

"The men who had so often abducted her before were foiled at last. They came within a few feet of her hiding-place, and one of them paused, but only to remark that he had never before seen a flower-bed and shrubbery in that part of the park. Marietta was saved!"

And the publisher nodded his head approvingly, and exclaimed:

"Now, there's some sense in that. If you make the alteration I will take the story and it ought to have a splendid sale."

O. P. W.

Your Editor Chats.

The final list in the Buried Names of Railway Stations competition will be found on the next page. All attempts must reach this office not later than first post on Thursday, June 18th, addressed to the Editor, Short Stories, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and marked Buried Stations in the top, left-hand corner.

On page 751 is the second list of "Jumbled Letters" in the new competition, which is sure to take every one's fancy. The re-arranging of the letters will be found to be a most fascinating pastime, and it is one that can be done whenever you have odd moments.

Our new serial story, "The Bond Between," continues to sustain the full interest of readers, and to arouse their curiosity as to what developments will take place as the story goes on. Of course it would only spoil the story were I to tell you now what will happen, but I am sure you will not be disappointed in any way. I hope that all of you who are reading and enjoying "The Bond Between" will recommend your friends to start it now. The summary on the first page will tell them all that is necessary for them to know regarding the chapters that have already been published.

Here is a capital way of helping the Fresh Air Fund. Those readers who have entered the competition which closes on June 18th cannot do better than inclose with their attempts a few stamps for that worthy object—of course those who prefer to inclose a postal order are quite at liberty to do so. A few stamps, however, no one would miss, but yet, when all those received are put together it would mean a day in the country for many little slum children.

It only takes ninepence to give one child a happy day, so if three people each send threepence that means happiness assured for one child. Non-competitors are also asked to contribute what they can—the more the better, and the sooner it is sent the easier it will be to arrange the excursions. All amounts should be sent to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and they will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Collecting forms can be had on application.

Your Editor.

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Closing Date June 18th. *Closing Date June 18th.*

BRAND NEW COMPETITION.

Cash Down. *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

And 25 Gramophones.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below will be found six paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom (or words that sound the same as the names). You must write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

No word or part of a word may be used more than once in making up the name of a Railway Station. In the event of the name of a Railway Station occurring more than once in a sentence, it should be underlined and written down each time. In case of more than one person finding the same number of words for each or any sentence, those words containing the largest number of letters will have preference. No name of a Railway Station may be composed of a single letter, either standing by itself or taken from any word in the sentences.

When you have discovered the names of Railway Stations in the sentences, underline (in ink) the words which go to make up the names (or words that sound the same as the names) and then on the line underneath each sentence write (in ink) the correct names of the Railway Stations to be found in each.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or Room Eight, SHORT STORIES, 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The names of the Railway Stations consist of one word or two or more consecutive words, or consecutive parts of one word, or two or more consecutive words.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, cut out the list below and fasten it to the other eleven lists. Then put them all in a envelope which you must address to the Editor, SHORT STORIES, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking it "Buried Stations" in the top left-hand corner. All attempts must arrive not later than first post on Thursday, June 18th.

In the event of a tie a further list (or, if necessary, several further lists) of sentences will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

CUT THROUGH HERE

EXAMPLE.

The oaks were swaying in the breeze, the cows were grazing peacefully, when out of the park tore a huge black bull.

The Oaks, Sway, Cowes, Grays, Park, Black Bull.

LAST LIST.

67. That part of the river, looking from Twickenham Ferry towards Richmond, has the most picturesque banks.

68. Bigger prices were obtained at the last goatskin sales than is usual. No legitimate reason could be assigned for it.

69. The valley, owing to the terrific rainstorms during the unsettled weather, became a slough and had to be bridged over.

70. A stoker's life is hardly one that would appeal to most people. It is so rough and ready. Shovelling coal all day becomes monotonous, too.

71. What a farce it is breaking up so early. The children have had no lessons to do them any solid good, but the mistress merely ignores that fact.

72. There was a great fall in home shares; others opened stronger and maintained a steady rise in price.

NAME..... ADDRESS .....

.....

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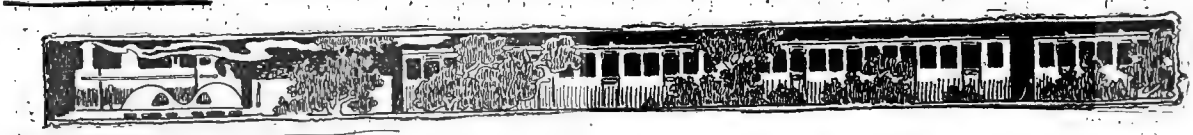
Splendid Series.



"Horace Stewart!" she cried, starting back and raising her hand as if to ward off a blow.

A Strange Encounter.

Being the fourth of six stories told in the Brighton Express and now related

BY

WINIFRED GRAHAM.

"Foo again!" said Stourbridge. "That reminds me of a story that I shall tell in due course when my turn arrives."

"Take it to-night," said Bremner. "No time like the present."

"Late one afternoon, when London was enveloped in a veil of yellow mist, a strange coincidence occurred. It was just such a fog as this, and even the muffin-man's bell sounded melancholy through the damp air as he bore his tray of sodden muffins up and down the deserted streets. He had the monopoly of the pavement save for an occasional policeman, blinking in the thick atmosphere with watery eyes.

"A thin, black cat, hearing the milkman's cry in an adjoining road, peered out; but the fog was too much even for her, and she as hastily retreated down the area. The lighted lamps glimmered faintly, becoming momentarily more indistinct. Darkness hung over the City like a pall; all seemed lifeless, silent, ghost-like.

"Barbara was groping for some railings, white with sudden dread, as she drew her long cloak closer round her and pressed her little cold cheek against her muff. The fog had overtaken her, and, after wandering about for over an hour, hopelessly confused, she began to think it would never lift.

"'I have lost my way. I am frightened!' she murmured, contemplating the now orange-coloured gloom.

"A dark figure loomed suddenly in the stifling vapour, and a man, also feeling his way by the railings, stumbled against her.

"'What have we here?' he said, half to himself; then, seeing it was a lady, raised his hat apologetically. 'I beg your pardon. I am afraid I startled you.'

"The sound of a human voice reassured Barbara, after the intense loneliness of her wanderings. She had begun to picture the night wearing slowly on, while she still strayed hither and thither, homeless and alone. Thankful to seek help from anyone, she addressed the stranger in a plaintive voice:

"'Can you by any chance tell me where I am?'

"'That is exactly what I want to know myself,' he replied, looking round in vain for some landmark. He was tall and upright, and though Barbara could not see his face his voice encouraged her. It was cheerful, kind, reassuring.

"'I live in Hyde Park Mansions,' she told him. 'Do you think I shall ever find my way there?'

"'Oh! yes. It seems somewhat hopeless for the moment, but I dare say you are not far off. If you will allow me, I'll do my best to put you on your road. There is really nothing for it but to walk on and trust in Providence.'

"'Thank you,' she said simply.

"Slowly they wended their way through the gloom, Barbara feeling slightly shy and embarrassed, but less alarmed than when she had been unprotected.

"'It is really not safe for a lady to be out alone such a day as this,' he declared. 'The darkness is most bewildering.'

"'It came on very suddenly. I was lunching with a friend, and never imagined anything so dreadful happening when I started to walk home. I feel like a blind beggar without a dog.'

"'I hope I am not leading you astray.'

"He paused as they were passing under a lamp. She gazed up at the blurred light as if in her confusion its dim glow could solve the problem of the premature night, and lead her back to surer paths. The yellow rays fell full on her profile.

"The man, with excusable curiosity, scanned the features

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of his fair companion ; while she, in her distress, never noticed his handsome, flashing eyes, nor the enigmatical expression which contracted his face. He started visibly at the sight of Barbara's troubled countenance, and hurried on, breathing hard, while his heart beat high, and his pulses throbbed. A moment since, and this episode amused him. He had looked on it as rather diverting than otherwise. Now it changed suddenly, with the dim flash of clouded gas light, into a tragedy !

"His hands were clenched, his teeth set. For a while he did not speak. When next he addressed Barbara his voice sounded husky. She thought it was caused by the fog, which made her own throat sore and smarting.

"'Your English climate is most depressing,' he said, trying to speak naturally. 'This atmosphere eats its way as poison into the system, to contaminate our lungs, clog our souls, lower our spirits. It falls like death on the City ; it is Nature's worst bane. I have just returned from India and the contrast is appalling. Perhaps I feel it more than a hardened Londoner, who has lived through the grime and fog, the bitter cold and cutting wind, year after year. I have been spoilt by the sultry heat for wintering in my native land.'

"He shivered. Barbara could hear his teeth chatter. She glanced up quickly, but his features were not easily distinguished.

"'India !' she cried. 'My husband was stationed there. I spent all my married life at Allahabad.'

"'Really,' he replied slowly. 'How strange ! that is where I was.'

"'Then, perhaps, you knew him, and the sad story attached to his death. It caused a great talk at the time, from its intensely sudden and tragic nature.'

"'His name ?'

"'Major Ramsay.'

"'Ah !'

"He heaved a deep sigh.

"'It is familiar to you ?'

"'Yes.'

"'Then you doubtless heard about the murder ?'

"He winced and bit his lip. Barbara spoke calmly. She waited a moment before he answered.

"'Murder ! that is a hard, an unjust word for it. Not even from the lips of his widow should such an expression be breathed.'

"'There were many differences of opinion on the subject, but mine has never wavered for an instant,' answered Mrs. Ramsay, her voice vibrating with sudden passion. 'Nothing is too hard ! I am not speaking at random, and I have had time to weigh the matter carefully in my own mind. I repeat —he was murdered. Perhaps you have never heard the exact details ?' Her eyes flashed as she spoke. She felt the heated glow of indignation course once more through her veins. A scene, far distant, rose before her out of the annals of the past—a sickening vision miraged in the yellow London fog.

"'My husband,' she said, as if speaking half to herself, 'had been suffering from an affection of the heart——'

"'Yes, yes ; I know.'

"'So did everyone, and we were most careful not to excite him. Any sudden agitation, the doctor said, might mean instantaneous death. A man came to our house one night and quarrelled over the card-table. He and my husband were gambling after dinner. I remember how I lay ill and feverish in my room, weakened by malaria, listening to the clink of money and wondering when it would end.

"'I had just fallen asleep when high words aroused me. I knew the terrible danger that threatened Julian should anything seriously disturb him. The tumult increased. I could hear a volley of imprecations from one of the two men, I knew not which, for I was dizzy with fear.

"'Like one in a dream I rushed into the room, only in time to see his adversary rise and strike him a violent blow. Then,' and her voice grew hoarse with horror, 'my husband fell back *dead* at my feet ! I can remember nothing more, the walls swam round in a sea of blood, the vengeance of Heaven seemed thundering in my ears and I dropped senseless by the body. It was proved that Major Ramsay died from disease of the heart, but the man was his murderer nevertheless.

"'In my spell of unconsciousness I saw Horace Stewart on the gallows, his rightful place. Ah ! I know what you are thinking, that I am vindictive, inhuman, but *you* were not there, *you* did not hear and witness the ghastly tragedy, amidst scattered cards and spilt wine.

"'I have never seen the man since, I pray Heaven that I never may. I should not have told you all this, but you spoke of that miserable place, and the very name Allahabad brings the past back so visibly I cannot help talking of it.'

"'The story is familiar to me, for I knew the unfortunate fellow who was with Major Ramsay that night. He is still living, poor chap !'

"'You pity him ?'

"'Yes, and therefore, if possible, I would justify him. Horace Stewart, till he met Major Ramsay (forgive me if I pain you), lived an honest, open life : his conscience clear, his record clean. No slur blackened his past, and there was not, perhaps, a more popular or respected man in the regiment. Your husband initiated him into the mysteries of a gambling den, imbuing him with the dangerous fascinating taste. He was little more than a boy, and the influence of his superior officer took a deep and evil hold upon him.

"'One night Major Ramsay asked him to his private house, and plied him with wine, of which he himself partook freely. After dinner his host suggested cards, and named high stakes. I know for a fact that he refused, but was finally overruled.

"'While they were playing, the Major, for some unaccountable reason, sprang suddenly to his feet, and accused this young subaltern of cheating. Stewart, in his hot-headed youthfulness and indignation, did not realise that the man who had insulted him was not responsible for what he said. He thought only of the vile slur on his honour, and denied it in language that was straight, if not strictly guarded. The Major, frenzied at his daring to reply, seized up a glass, and flung it in Horace Stewart's face, cutting him severely. He bears the marks to this day.'

"'I remember the blood on the man's mouth,' said Barbara shuddering. She hastened her steps, clenching her hands in the warm recesses of her fur muff.

"'Have you anything more to say ?'

"'Yes ; hear me out. Maddened with pain and rage, Stewart sprang upon him. What would have happened next Heaven only knows ! Death intervened. Swift and terrible was the judgment that fell upon Major Ramsay and his unfortunate companion, who stood petrified with horror at the sight of that sudden end. He remembers a young and beautiful woman entering the room and flinging herself between them with a cry which he would have given

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a whole lifetime not to have heard. It haunts him even now, sleeping and waking.

"'The thought of her frightened eyes and livid lips have never left him. "You have killed my husband!" she moaned, wringing her hands, and, though he was not guilty, he felt that the bane of the slayer was on him. He watched them at his feet, side by side—husband and wife—one dead, the other senseless. From that moment his happiness fled. It seemed as if the woman had pronounced his doom; branded him with her terrible condemnation.

"'In spirit he followed the girl-widow from those Indian shores, praying day and night that she might be comforted. The memory of that fatal evening's work dogs his steps. He seeks rest, but finds none. That event has left its mark upon him, and his friends say he has never been the same since. It is remorse that kills. Perhaps you have never known the real meaning of the word? If so, you would pity Horace Stewart—heart and soul.'

"Barbara, absorbed in the conversation, wandered blindly on with her companion, not heeding time or place. The incident that had brought them together was forgotten in a maze of entangled thought. Present and past blended in a yellow blur, like the shadows that came and vanished through the mist.

"'I think I understand,' she said at last.

"'What?'

"'About remorse. It is the most horrible, far-reaching sorrow of all. A pain that stretches like the long fingers of Time to the very brink of eternity. You cannot stamp it out. Revenge is a sin, and I believe I could conquer this longing to injure Horace Stewart if I thought that he had suffered as I have since my loss.

"'It was the knowledge that I despised my own husband—was cold, hard, cruel to him for his faults—which made his death so bitter for me to bear. I might have tried to influence him—to make him better—but, in my disgust, I wrapped myself in a freezing armour of reserve, and not till the opportunity had passed did retribution take the form of life-long agonising remorse. I wonder'—pausing suddenly—'why I tell you this? I have never before breathed the true cause of my grief to anyone.'

"'Then you ought, instead of harbouring revengeful thoughts about Horace Stewart, to feel sorry for him. I know him, Mrs. Ramsay, as thoroughly as myself. We have never been separated. I have suffered with him, the pain has been mine as well.'

"'Then he is in London with you now?'

"'Yes. May I not take back some message, one kind word from the lips of Barbara Ramsay?'

"'Bring him to me,' broke in Barbara sharply. 'I have grown hardened. It may soften me.'

"She slipped off the pavement as her companion guided her to a crossing. The strong support of his arm steadied her, and they groped their way onwards.

"'It is the darkest hour before the dawn,' he murmured. 'There is hope for you and Horace Stewart. You have both suffered, so you will understand each other.'

"'Do you think so?' she replied, half doubtingly. 'Perhaps when I see his face my hate will overcome my pity. I am afraid of my own bad nature breaking out before the man who brought this burden of remorse upon me. What if a sudden sense of repulsion, a swift reaction, deadens the good and quickens the bad that lies dormant, or holds sway, in every being? Then I should call him a murderer——'

"She ceased speaking, arrested by a sense of something about to happen; she knew not what. The fog lifted suddenly, and her eyes fell full upon her companion as the word 'murderer' was on her lips.

"'*Horace Stewart!*' she cried, starting back, and raising her hands as if to ward off a blow.

"'Yes,' he muttered, with downcast eyes. 'Why did you not guess it from the first?'

"Dazed by this fresh discovery, she drew nearer, as if still doubting her senses, and stared at him fixedly. The shock staggered her! She had conjured up the face so often in connection with all that was most repugnant and horrible.

"'I did not dream for one moment that I had been speaking with *you*,' she gasped. 'It is an insult to the dead!'

"'Yet a moment ago you bade me bring him to you. Now he is here you turn away.'

"The man spoke pleadingly. He grasped her hand, but she drew it back, trembling with indignation.

"'Don't come near me! Don't touch me! How dare you?'

"Her mood varied in a moment. She felt contaminated by his presence.

"'You cannot pity or forgive? Is it too much to ask? Think calmly of all that we have said. Am I unworthy to implore this thing? There is the one link between us still—remorse, undying! Speak to me, Barbara Ramsay. I beg but two words from your lips—friendship, pardon!'

"'No, no, no!'

"She dashed on through the fog, now descending more heavily.

"He followed closely, afraid to leave her. She seemed to be hastening blindly forward, without sense or reason. Her faculties had become paralysed, numb!

"An array of dark objects loomed in the road, but Barbara did not see them in her headlong career. She only wanted to escape from Horace Stewart and the miserable story of the past.

"Suddenly her flight was arrested. She ran into something big and black—a horse with a flowing mane, which reared his head above her hat.

"Barbara, startled and frightened, slipped upon the road, and fell with a cry in front of the vehicle.

"But Horace Stewart, following closely, already seeing the danger, seized the animal's head with one hand and helped Mrs. Ramsay to her feet with the other.

"'Are you hurt?' he cried anxiously.

"'No, but what is it?'

"She wrung her hands, and he could feel her trembling as he took her arm protectingly.

"'A funeral lost in the fog. But don't give way like this! I am not going to harm you.'

"'No,' she said, 'you saved me.'

"'Where are we, governor?' shouted the hearse driver.

"'I don't know,' he replied, hurrying Barbara by a line of mourning carriages.

"The sight of the burial procession filled her with a sense of solemn horror. Even Stewart's company was acceptable at that moment, despite its sad associations. She wondered if after all she had judged him too harshly. Her courage was slowly ebbing away as the prolonged darkness increased. It seemed enveloping her soul and scattering her wits.

"Horace was quick to perceive her growing alarm and hastened to reassure her.

"'I think I know where I am. Only keep near me, and you shall be home soon, safe in the shelter of Hyde Park Mansions.'

"'You are very good,' she faltered, already regretting her cruel words. The remark, so faintly murmured, quickened the pulsation of his heart, for Barbara's presence held some mystic fascination for him. The haunting memory of her face had clung to him so long, that now, though he could not see her eyes gradually softening, he knew instinctively that her better nature was gaining the upper hand.

"'I wonder,' she said at last, 'how many hours that poor body will be before it reaches its grave?'

"'The fog is lifting again; we are coming to the light.'

"Barbara glanced up, relieved. A smile broke over her face, while a sigh of satisfaction escaped her, as she recognised her surroundings.

"'You have guided me well'—she paused. 'Is it by chance that you have brought me to my very door?'

"'Not exactly. I knew where you lived. I have been acquainted with your movements for some time.'

"'Who tells you about me?'

"'One of your greatest friends, and mine.'

"'A woman?'

"'Yes.'

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"'Dora Lyell? She has never mentioned your name to me.'

"'No. It could only have given you pain, and you would not have welcomed any message from Horace Stewart. She is a relation of mine, and we always corresponded—so far away at Allahabad, I treasured each word of news concerning Barbara Ramsay.'

"She turned from him slowly to hide the tears that forced themselves into her eyes, and mounted the steps of the house by which they were standing.

"She surveyed him in silence, as he lingered a moment on the pavement watching her.

"'Will you not say one kind word?' he asked.

"Barbara hesitated.

"In every life there is a crisis, when some decision must be made that will lay an impress on the future, for weal or woe.

"She felt that this man—risen like a sceptre in the gloom—had an influence on her destiny.

"He looked wet and cold, for they had tramped far together. It was drizzling miserably, and she thought of the warm fire within as she pealed the bell.

"He noted her indecision, and, raising his hat, walked away without a word. Her heart melted as his figure vanished in the misty air.

"'Horace Stewart,' she called faintly, 'you may come back!'

"He caught the tearful tone, whispered so low through the heavy atmosphere, that Barbara marvelled at his alertness.

"A moment later they were standing side by side in a cheerfully lighted hall.

"The brightness dazzled him as she led the way to a cosy boudoir, where the gleams from a blazing fire threw grotesque shadows on the silver tea-tray and quaint ornaments.

"Wonderfully homelike and comfortable it looked, after the dreariness without.

"In silence she drew a second chair to the hearth.

"For a while neither of them spoke, each feeling irresistibly the soothing influence of their surroundings.

"'I wish I could understand myself,' she said suddenly, leaning forward, and staring into the fire, with her chin in her hands.

"Stewart grasped his opportunity to awaken her sympathy and confidence. Long they sat together, till the fire dwindled through neglect, speaking such words as drift on between men and women, when Fate brings them together in some new or mysterious way.

"Barbara's eyes were moist when Horace Stewart rose to say good-bye.

"'You shall be my friend always,' she said.

"'Never more than a friend?' he asked, 'through all the years that are to follow?'

"'I am only a woman,' she replied softly; 'you must not tempt me.'

"But, as Barbara turned away, she smiled."

The booming of fog signals on the line broke in, as if applauding the story.

"You have given us a chapter from two lives—illustrated," said Mr. Carter. "The elements are your artists."

(Next week: The Return of the Prodigal.)

"THIS is a forget-me-not," remarked Jawkins, as he looked at the string on his finger, and wondered why his wife had tied it there.

"IN mid-ocean we met a magnificent private yacht flying signals of distress." "Leaking?" "Oh, no; their cook wanted to leave."

MRS. KNAGGS (as her husband comes in late at night): "What does the clock say, John?" Mr. Knaggs (with difficulty): "Nothing, madam, nothing. It's got sense enough to say nothing."

HOLLOWAY'S PILLS AND OINTMENT

THE FAMOUS HOUSEHOLD REMEDIES

THE PILLS

have gained their wonderful reputation by sheer force of merit, because every person who uses them recommends them to others. They have positively no equal for thoroughly cleansing the system and putting the liver and kidneys in functional order, without pain or griping. They are the best known remedy for Indigestion, Biliousness, Headache, Dizziness, and the common condition of ill-health, known as "run-down" or "out of sorts." Females of every age find Holloway's Pills an invaluable remedy and aid.

THE OINTMENT

is known throughout the world as positively the best and quickest remedy for Bad Legs, Old Wounds and Sores, and Skin Eruptions of every kind, and should be used in conjunction with the Pills. It is also the speediest remedy for Rheumatism, Lumbago, Pains and Stiffness in the Limbs and Joints, Backache, &c. For pains and Soreness at the Chest, and for Throat and Lung Complaints arising from Cold or Weakness, Holloway's Ointment affords most welcome relief in a very short time.

A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

A Village Mystery.

Telling of How a Girl Saved her Lover.

"I TELL you once and for all it is impossible—I would die sooner than my daughter should wed a pauper." The speaker, old Farmer Talbot, was white with rage, and he more than once threateningly raised a heavy hunting-crop he carried.

His companion, a good-looking young fellow of some two and twenty summers, up to this point had kept his temper during a long harangue of which the above was merely the tag, but the last remark proved too much for him.

"Very well, Mr. Talbot, if that is your decision, then listen to mine. I swear that I shall marry Alice very soon, and neither you nor any other man will prevent me. I am poor because circumstances have been against me, but I can work, and as for your money, you insult me by mentioning it. We love one another very dearly, and there's no need to make your miserable wealth a stumbling block between us."

Leonard Chadwick tried to speak calmly, but inwardly he was boiling with indignation.

"Don't you dare give me any of your insolence about what you are going to do," Talbot replied in passionate tones, "for if I catch you speaking to my daughter again I'll—I'll horsewhip you—you fortune-hunting young vagabond!"

He made a sudden movement forward as he spoke, his face convulsed with rage, and, raising the crop he carried, aimed a violent blow at Leonard's head; the latter, stepping back quickly, avoided its full force, but the stick descended heavily on his right hand, causing him to drop the rifle he was carrying to the ground. For a moment he stood irresolute, livid with fury at this attack, then, picking up his weapon, he muttered hoarsely:

"You shall hear more about this, sir. You are *her* father, and only that fact keeps my hands from you now." With these words he strode rapidly from the spot.

* * * * *

The little village of Cherry Linton was all agog with excitement. Nearly everyone who was somebody, and the majority of those who were not, had turned out to witness the opening of a grand new rifle range.

This was a free gift from Sir Samuel Barnes, who had recently been imbued with the prevalent and laudable notion that every young fellow ought to be able to handle a gun, whether the country were in danger or not. So he accordingly, and entirely at his own expense, turned over a considerable portion of his magnificent estate to the good cause.

The site chosen for this purpose was perfect in every way. Far away from any habitation the targets were placed at the bottom of a lofty hill which formed, Sir Samuel argued, an absolute and natural protection against the possibility of stray shots.

It was a lovely May day as Cherry Linton, wearing its best bib and tucker, laughed and jostled itself into Sir Samuel's grounds. Light refreshments had been provided in a huge marquee, and a band specially engaged discoursed some lively Sousa melodies.

The gentry of the neighbourhood, at Sir Samuel's invitation, threw aside all formality on this occasion and waited on the villagers.

Foremost amongst the helpers was Alice Talbot. Her sunny face, partly hidden beneath a large white hat, was here, there, and everywhere. She not only reflected the sun's rays in her pretty golden curls, but was herself a little ray of sunshine penetrating into the very hearts of all she came in contact with.

Now and then she would place her tray of fruit, lemonade and cakes on the grass and run nimbly to the gate anxiously looking up the high road, in the direction of her own homestead. At last she was rewarded, for presently she espied Leonard coming slowly along the road.

"Why, Leonard, how late you are; and, gracious, how ill you're looking!" she exclaimed in a breath, as he approached.

"Yes, I am late, little one, but there was a reason for it," he said nervously looking back.

"Why, what do you mean, dear?" she asked, placing her hands in his. "And where is father—you said you would bring him on here."

"Well, I haven't, I left him down there," and Leonard pointed rather grimly behind him.

At that moment, before the lovers had time for further conversation, a group of noisy youngsters surrounded them, begging Leonard to come on to the range and open fire with the rest. By this time the fun was in full swing, the popping of corks vainly resounded against the sharp rifle cracks, the hum of bullets as they sped through the air, and the metallic thwack when their further progress was sometimes stopped by their would-be iron destination.

As Leonard with his little following made their way to the firing-point, they were met by Sir Samuel, who exclaimed jovially:

"Ah, my lads, now you must look to your laurels. Here comes young Chadwick with a real live 'Martini-Henry,' I declare!"

Way was instantly made for him, for not only was he very popular in the village, but his prowess with firearms was well known; so great things were expected on his arrival.

To everyone's surprise, however, Leonard handed his rifle to the nearest bystander with a bag of cartridges, saying he was not feeling well and would not shoot.

A murmur of delight went round as one after the other each aspiring sharpshooter during the next twenty minutes blazed away to his heart's content with Leonard's weapon, for the two "Lee-Metfords" provided by Sir Samuel were rapidly exhausting the patience of the many waiting their turn.

Alice was not slow to see that something very much out of the way must have occurred to prevent her lover from indulging in his favourite sport, and she came over and took his arm.

"There is something wrong with my boy," she said, leading him away from the crowd, "and he must tell me all about it this very minute."

"I cannot, Alice—I cannot. You must not ask me. It is true I am upset, and I have barely had time to make my mind up as to what my next step will be. There is one thing,

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though, dearest, you must prepare for a separation. I shall have to leave you for a time at least."

"Leave me, Leonard?" she asked, a slight pallor overspreading her face. "Leave me—why, what for?"

"Only your father——"

"My father; then you have been speaking to him about me, and high words have passed between you both. I see it all!" she gasped hurriedly. "Oh, my poor Leonard, I am so sorry you should have suffered mental pain on my account. I know exactly what he thinks—the son of a bank clerk is not the husband for me. Never mind, Leonard, be brave; all will come right in the end. Dad is not bad at heart, though he does let his temper get the better of him very often."

"Thanks for your sympathy, dear," Leonard rejoined, moodily looking away from her, "but things have come to a serious pass between your father and me. We shall never speak to each other again. He raised his hand against me, and I——"

"My father dared to do that?" she cried, the warm colour rushing to her cheeks.

Leonard was about to reply when another interruption took place. Sir Samuel Barnes was running towards them calling Alice's name out as he ran.

"Whatever is the matter?" she cried nervously, clutching Leonard's arm. "How startled he looks."

"Quick, child!" said the old knight, as he came up to them. "A man on a bicycle has just arrived to say your father has met with an accident about a mile down the road. Get home, where he is being taken, as soon as possible; they will want all the help they can get."

"Oh, my poor father," she cried, as the revulsion of feeling took possession of her. "Come, Leonard, we must go to him at once," and without another word she sped across the grass in the direction of the gate.

Leonard was about to follow, but Sir Samuel caught his arm and whispered:

"I daren't tell the girl myself, but a ghastly crime has been committed. Farmer Talbot is murdered. He was found shot through the back ten minutes ago. Go now, my boy, and comfort that poor girl as best you may."

Leonard staggered forward a pace or two, then, without a word, broke away from Sir Samuel and hurried off in the direction Alice had taken. She had a good start, however, and as he stumbled up to the gate she was just getting into a governess-cart Sir Samuel had thoughtfully pressed into her service. She waved her hand and disappeared down the road.

As Leonard made his way after her, he had not proceeded far when he became conscious that those who passed looked at him with a certain degree of curiosity, sometimes mixed with awe. A young mother drew her child almost into the hedge with a scream as he rapidly strode by, while further on two lads stopped open-mouthed as they pointed at him.

About half way to Talbot's Farm, Horton, the police sergeant of Cherry Linton, came suddenly round a bend in the road and came face to face with him. Horton looked white, either with exertion or excitement, and he halted in front of young Chadwick.

"Mr. Chadwick, I have painful news for you. It is my duty to arrest you on suspicion of having shot Mr. Talbot."

As Leonard was about to speak, he added quickly—

"For God's sake, sir, say nothing, or whatever is said may be taken in evidence against you. Come quietly with me, and may this shadow pass as quickly as it has descended on you!"

Outside the little rural police station, a crowd of villagers had already assembled, and when Horton with his prisoner was preparing to cross the threshold, a woman, pale as death, broke from amongst their ranks. With eyes glazed with horror, she gave one anguished glance at Horton's prisoner, murmuring—

"Leonard, Leonard, how could you have done this?" She then tottered forward and fell in a dead faint at his feet.

The case as it stood for the prosecution was perfect when Leonard Chadwick was formally committed for trial at the

(*Continued overleaf.*)

A Clergyman on Happiness.

"I have lived long enough," says an eminent clergyman and Doctor of Divinity, "to learn that the secret of happiness is never to allow one's energies to stagnate."

It's easy talking, Doctor, but we have to allow some things to happen whether we will or not. When a man hasn't a morsel to eat and can't get food anywhere, he is obliged to "allow" himself to go hungry. And "energies" come from something—are dependent on something. When that something fails then the energies stagnate, in spite of all the doctors in the world—theological or medical. You can't stir up your energies as you stir meal-and-water—with a stick.

Hear a little testimony on that point from a lady residing at Tideford, St. Germans, in Cornwall. Speaking of a personal experience dating back to her girlhood, she says: "I always felt drowsy and exhausted and had no interest or joy in life whatever." In other words, her energies stagnated—a state of things which the clergyman thinks one ought not to allow to happen. Why did it happen? Let the lady herself explain. "I was but a girl when first troubled with indigestion," she writes. "I enjoyed good health up to a certain period, when my appetite declined and the little I ate caused dreadful pain in the chest and brought on palpitation. I was quickly done up and had an unreasonable dread of some impending evil. Such was my condition for months, growing worse day by day until I became so thin and weak that I could hardly get about.

We venture to say our clerical friend never had indigestion as this lady had it, or he would never have talked so glibly about not allowing one's energies to stagnate. In mercy's name how can one help it when indigestion is wringing the life out of one. If one has energy enough to do as did this lady—Miss Eliza Peters—there is cause to be thankful. She acted on the advice of a neighbour, who had been in a like condition, and sent for a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup. It took several bottles to cure her, for the indigestion was deep-seated, but cure her it did and so completely that she has never been troubled with it since. Such is her testimony and it may be relied on implicitly.

People who lack energy, feel tired, languid, feeble, nervous ill and unhappy, need one thing to make them strong, bright, vigorous and comfortable again, viz., food.

Food will do it, when everything else has failed entirely. After it is digested it will do it, not before. When your stomach is so deranged that it cannot digest your food, Seigel's Syrup will tone it up and help it to do its work. That is how and why it has brought energy, health and happiness to thousands of tired, dyspeptic men and women, who, without it, to quote our clerical friend, found it impossible "never to allow one's energies to stagnate."

Domestic Friction.

"The longer I live," writes "A Countess" in the "Outlook," "the more convinced I am that breakfast is the cause of more domestic friction than can be accounted for by mere incompatibility of temper. It is not in human nature," she adds, "to be amiable in the early morning." Why it is so, is easy to understand when we remember that nine people out of every ten suffer from indigestion in one form or other. To awake in the morning fagged and worn out, dull of head and weary of limb, and with a taste in the mouth that makes breakfast a mockery, is certainly not conducive to good temper and geniality. The fault is not with the breakfast but with the stomach that should call for and digest it. Thousands of dyspeptics have proved the power of Mother Seigel's Syrup to cleanse and tone the stomach, liver, and kidneys, sharpen the appetite, assist digestion, even the temper and invigorate the system. Says one of them, Mrs. Holloway, of 3, Church Street, Henley-on-Thames, "I used to suffer such dreadful agony from indigestion. For years my life was a misery. After doctors' treatment had failed, my son's wife made me try Seigel's Syrup and gradually the pain subsided. All the other ailments followed and soon I was as well as ever."

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next assizes. Not a single link in the chain of evidence was missing to brand him as the author of the crime.

A witness had sworn on oath that at 11.50 to the minute on the morning of May 13th he had seen from the road the deceased and accused together engaged in what seemed to be a violent altercation just inside the drive leading to Talbot's farm.

Two other important witnesses deposed to seeing from the same position at about 12.15 a prostrate body lying across the drive.

Climbing over the gate, they were shocked to find it was Farmer Talbot himself bleeding profusely from a gunshot wound in the back. Bending over and endeavouring to lend him every aid, they distinctly heard him say, "This is the work of Leonard Chadwick!" Before further assistance could be procured, life had become extinct.

The medical evidence went to show that the fatal injury had been caused by a partly-spent Martini-Henry rifle bullet, which had entered the centre of the back, and finally lodged in the upper regions of the chest. It was impossible for the wound to have been self-inflicted.

There was no direct evidence whatever in connection with the crime. It was purely circumstantial. No one actually saw it commmitted, yet not the slightest doubt existed in anyone's mind that Chadwick was the murderer.

There was the quarrel for the motive, the startling, incriminating admission of the dying man, the poignant fact that Chadwick's was the only rifle of that particular make able to be traced in Cherry Linton.

His pale face and peculiar, nervous manner on his arrival at the range; all were overwhelming testimony to his guilt, and there could hardly be conceived a simpler case to prove than this particular one the Crown had undertaken.

In spite of all, Leonard protested he was absolutely innocent. He pleaded "not guilty," and swore that although he had left Talbot in a frenzy of passion, he had not raised a finger against him.

At first, Alice, numb with horror, as one by one the startling array of convincing proofs were brought like spectres before her, allowed herself to believe her lover had been led away by passion, and committed the act in a moment of madness, but as the days of the earlier investigations dragged along their weary length, she watched the face of her lover as he stood upright in the dock, calm and fearless, and she read the light of truth in his eyes when he said calmly—

"I swear before God and the whole world, I am innocent!"

The day he was committed for trial, she left the Court House, her eyes burning with an unnatural brilliance. She was convinced that he was falsely accused, and thereupon determined to move Heaven and earth itself to prove it.

The fact that she was only a frail woman did not deter her in the least, the enormity of the difficult task had no terror for her. She undertook to unravel, unaided, a mystery that would have taxed the powers of the keenest and most experienced detective.

For two whole days she wandered up and down the route Leonard had traversed on the day of the tragedy, examining every inch of the ground in the dim hope of discovering a clue that would lead to the real truth. But no success attended her efforts.

On the morning of the third day an idea suddenly occurred to her, and her heart began to beat with a new-found hope. To-day was Saturday. It was only a tiny glimmer—a chance in a million of it ever leading to a correct solution, but it became indelibly imprinted in her mind and she would see it through.

She accordingly made her way to the place where her father's body had been found, and, seating herself on a rustic bench in a little alcove abutting on the carriage drive, took up her curious vigil.

Straight in front several fields stretched for two miles, terminating at the richly wooded estate of Sir Samuel Barnes. According to the evidence that had been forthcoming, Leonard, it was suggested, must have fired the shot from some position in these fields, and then walked across to the left, and so regained the road that led directly to the gate where she met him on that fatal day. So that actually the firing point of the new range was to the extreme left of where she was sitting, and the targets far distant to the right.

Straining her ears and labouring under strong mental excitement, she was at last rewarded. She distinctly heard the sound of distant firing. Shooting had commenced at Sir Samuel's, as was usual every Saturday at noon.

Alice left her seat and swiftly ran along the drive fully conscious of the fact that if her idea were correct she was running a great danger, and perhaps her own life would pay the forfeit. Now and then she stopped and bent low over the ground, watching and waiting for a sign. Would it never come?

At last, just as she was beginning to despair, something hissed quite close to her, and crashed into the bark of an oak tree by her side.

With a scream of triumph she flung herself on her hands and knees and closely examined a small hole that had been bored in the tree. She then jumped to her feet, and darted to the other side of the drive, and with staring, anxious eyes, watched the open end of an earthenware irrigation pipe, long since disused.

She had not long to wait ere another metal missile emerged and, ricocheting off the gravelled path, also buried itself with a resounding crash in a tree opposite. This time the mark was breast high.

Here at last was the explanation of the mystery. The dim hope that she had so miraculously conceived developed into a substantial fact—the truth was out!

Farmer Talbot had been killed accidentally by a shot fired from Leonard's rifle by one of the villagers on the day the range was opened, and the bullet, fired wide of the target, curiously enough, was conveyed unobserved from the other end of the pipe to the present spot. Naturally, as the shot struck him in the back, Talbot could only conjecture in his dying moments that Leonard was his cowardly assailant.

Running from the place at breathless speed, Alice, with tear-stained face summoned what assistance she could, and, as the news spread, a considerable portion of the village folk quickly made their way to the carriage drive to see such a phenomenal death-trap in full working order.

Meanwhile, on the "Cease fire" being sounded, search was made at the new range, and there, sure enough, was discovered a large gaping hole quite close to the last target, from which the unseen pipe directly led by a long, tortuous course beneath the ground to the place where it abruptly ended by Talbot's Farm.

* * * * *

Once again did Cherry Linton have a great gala day, soon after Leonard's release from durance, and on this occasion accompanied by the merry jangle of village wedding bells, which entirely owed their present sweet office to a woman's heroism, love and Heaven-sent intuition. **Vivian Grey.**

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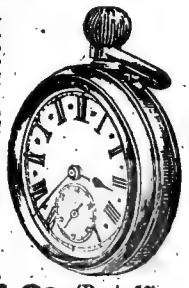

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HE: "What's the matter with these cigars?" She: "Why, dear, they smelt so horrid that I put some eau-de-Cologne on them!"

A Good Hater.

NOTTING: "How can you sit here with that Chaffer woman playing on that confounded piano of hers in the next flat?" Helter: "Oh, I enjoy it. It reminds me that she is Chaffer's wife. I hate Chaffer, you know."

Not Inconsistent.

"I'M afraid of you," said Miss Kittish to Mr. Callow, saucily. "That's stwange," replied Mr. Callow. "A few minutes ago you—aw—said that you were afraid of nothing, doncher know." "Well, what of that?"

Careful of his Trousers.

MISS CASHLEY: "You have dropped your handkerchief on the floor, Mr. Van Dudekin." Van Dudekin (preparing to get on his knees): "I did it with a purpose, dear Miss Cashley—er—Edith, I love you; will you be my wife?"

Mother Understood.

"MY dear," said Mrs. Richleigh to her daughter the other evening, after young Woodby had departed, "how in the world did your hair become so disarranged?" "Why, mamma," replied the quick-witted miss, "I suppose it must be from shaking my head so much when Mr. Woodby was trying to coax me to say yes." And the mother suddenly remembered that she had once been a girl herself.

Coincidence.

"SOMEHOW, I'm awfully stupid to-night," remarked young Borum, languidly the other evening. "Indeed you are," retorted Miss Cutting, somewhat impulsively. "Do you really mean that?" asked the young man in surprise. "I merely indorsed your remarks; didn't you just now assert that you were stupid?" she queried. "Yes," he responded, "but I only said so without thinking." "And up to the time you spoke of it," she replied, "I only thought so without saying it."

The Press Did its Duty.

"OH, I think it must be so nice to be connected with a newspaper," said Miss M'Flinn to young Quilldriver, as they sat together one evening. "Yes, it is so," he replied. "But why do you think it is?" "Why, it has so many advantages. I should think you would glory in the freedom, the power, the liberty, and all the privileges of the Press." "Certainly I do. It's a pity with all your enthusiasm on the subject that you are not a journalist." "I think so, too; but you know it is hard for a woman to get recognition. I should be delighted to think that the Press embraced me." "Oh, you would, would you? Great Scott! wait till I turn down the gas."

Good for the Other One.

HE paid her a thousand golden sovereigns, for damages done to her heart, and with it she and her true lover were able to get quite a start.

There Wouldn't be Time.

"I WOULD die a thousand deaths for you," said the villain in his most silken tones. "I fear me much," said the heroine, whose love was growing cold, "that the piece will not run that long."

The Decrease of Love.

ROLLINS: "I begin to doubt whether my wife still loves me as she used to do." Collins: "Why so?" Rollins: "Because I came home last night with my hair cut and she never noticed it."

A Man Under the Bed.

"OLD Miss Sere saw a man under her bed at last." "Good gracious! What did she say?" "She told him to look out for the plastering. He was carrying the bed downstairs on his head. You see, she moved yesterday."

His Terrible Confession.

SHE: "Before we are married and it is for ever too late, confess to me whether there is anything in your past life that you think I might not approve of." He (trembling): "Well, if you must know all, I kept a diary for nearly three weeks once."

Change was Good.

"VAIN, vain," he cried in agony. "For I am a poor man, while you have been reared up in the lap of luxury." Into her eyes came a dreamy look, such as ordinary persons affect when their corns hurt them; but she was no ordinary person. "One lap gets mighty monotonous," she observed gently, for there was her maidenly reserve to be thought of.

Liked the Setting.

"YOUR every tooth is a milk-white pearl," tenderly whispered the lover fond. And softly laughed the winsome girl when the moonshine caught in her tresses blonde. His lips neared hers, but before they met in a kiss, the rest of the world forgetting, "You like pearls, then?" said the small coquette, "Not so much," he replied, "as I like their setting."

Caught in a Box.

"WHY is it," he asked, "that beautiful women are always the most stupid?" "Sir," she replied, "am I to understand that you desire to cast reflections upon my mental capacity?" "Oh, no," he hurriedly returned; "I have always said that you were one of the cleverest girls I ever——" But he didn't finish. Before he could do so he realised that he had said the wrong thing, and could never make it right.

Easy to Promise.

IN her heart love and duty strove for mastery, and duty won. "No man shall wed me," she exclaimed, with suffused eyes and quivering lips, "who does not promise me that if he is ever Prime Minister of the United Kingdom he will use his influence to have battleships christened with water!" Such was the ardour of his passion that Algernon hesitated not a moment. "I promise," he cried, and fell upon his knees.

After the First Quarrel.

"GO!" she exclaimed, "and never speak to me again!" He passed out into the unsympathetic night, but paused when he reached the street, and drew something bright from one of his inside pockets. As he did so, the beautiful girl, who was watching him from the front door, uttered a shrill scream and ran towards him. "Albert," she cried, "what would you do? Pray do not kill yourself! Throw your revolver away, and let us forget our quarrel." "It isn't a revolver," he replied, as he caught her in his arms. "It's a sixpenny spanner I borrowed from you that day my bicycle broke down. I have been wearing it next to my heart ever since." Then they returned to the parlour and took up the thread of love's dream where it had been broken.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Case of Corpulence.

"GERTY" is only nineteen, but is getting very fat. How can she prevent herself from growing too corpulent? Exercise is the best thing—plenty of walking, if you can get it, or any other outdoor occupation that comes your way. Then, as to diet, don't eat much pastry, sweets, or jam, avoid taking sugar in your tea or too much butter, and make your diet as simple as possible. A few months of this will soon show you whether or not you are able to reduce your weight by ordinary means. If not, then consult a doctor.

A Question of a Ring.

"SHOULD I accept a ring from a young fellow I have been meeting for four months?" writes "KIDDIE." "I am a barmaid, not yet eighteen years old, and though I like him very well, I don't feel that I love him. He is four years older than I, and very anxious for us to become engaged."

* * * * *

You are rather young, "KIDDIE," to become engaged. And as you have not made up your mind as to your feelings towards the young man, wait awhile before you pledge yourself to him. You have plenty of time, and should not be too rash just now, as perhaps you will meet someone you really love, and that would lead to great trouble if you were engaged.

Calf Love Symptoms.

"MATER" is troubled as to her son. He is nineteen, and for weeks past has been out very late at night. He gives the excuse either that he has been late at the office, or with his male friends, and yet his manner is usually very reserved.

* * * * *

It looks like a case of love. You had better let it go on, "MATER," as it is a thing most boys experience at his age, and little good comes of interference by parents. If the affair continues, and looks like lasting, tell him you know all about it, and ask him to bring the girl home. She may, for all you know, be quite the right sort, and though she is young, a man never loses by the society of a good and true woman, even though he may not yet be able to propose marriage.

Caught Red Handed.

"A. S." is a young man, and has been courting a very pretty girl for some time without his parents' knowledge. The other day they went out of town, and "A.S." thinking the coast was clear, asked the girl to go to his home and have tea. On his arrival with the girl, he was met in the hall by his mother, who had unexpectedly returned. How should he have explained his conduct?

* * * * *

He should have at once introduced the girl as a lady friend. If he was not ashamed of her, this would be the only straightforward thing to do. To attempt to conceal matters by deception would only embarrass both yourself and the girl.

Getting Introductions.

"G. O. E." has read my advice on the subject of mutual friends, and how girls and young men should employ them in the affairs of the heart. She is attracted by a man she does not know, like a great many others, and knows that both of them have mutual friends who could secure the introduction. Who should take the first step in the matter?

* * * * *

I would first find out from a mutual friend whether the young man is interested in you, and if they do not know, get them to find out. If he is, then the mutual friend might well be employed in giving the introductions. But if he is really so taken by you, he would probably have put the machinery in motion earlier. It is the man's province to take the first steps in getting to know a girl.

In Love with a Scholar.

"ANNIE" is very much in love with a man ten years older than herself. He is a very clever man, and a great scholar, whose conversation is far above "ANNIE'S" head. How could she make known to him the fact that she is so attracted?

* * * * *

You had better first see if he shows any signs of being equally interested in you. A girl should never "throw her cap" at a man, particularly one who is her superior mentally. Very likely he is like most other clever men, fonder of the society of simple girls than those of his own mental rank. In this case he will certainly show you whether or not he is interested in you. When with the man avoid trying to appear his equal in knowledge. That is a mistake. Men like girls to be natural.

Madness in the Family.

"SHOULD a man let his *fiancé* know all his family affairs?" asks "F.R." "I am sorry to say that many of my relations have developed insanity, and I myself am given to fits of depression. If I told the girl this, it might make her parents break off the match."

* * * * *

If she has known you long enough to be engaged to you I suppose she knows how far your fits of depression are likely to mean anything serious. Insanity, of course, does run in families, but it doesn't at all follow that you are likely to develop it, though probably if your mind were overstrained, or you had a great deal of worry, you would be less able to bear it than people whose families are free from such trouble. The only thing is for you to lead as quiet a life as possible, and avoid over-excitement. If your fits of depression are really serious take medical advice, and base whatever you tell the girl on the doctor's verdict.

Would it be Forward?

"MY dilemma is great," writes "LONESOME." "The other day I dropped my handkerchief, and a young man I admire very much picked it up for me. Would it be forward for me to bow to him next time we meet?"

* * * * *

What a curious thing it should be that it was a very young man who picked it up, and was it quite accidental, "LONESOME?" Yes, it would be rather forward for you to bow to him next time. But such forward things are done very often in this world. Sometimes they have very happy results.

* * * * *

If it would be possible for you to get to know the man socially, and you know that he is a desirable acquaintance, of whom your parents would approve, the bow might not be altogether a mistake. If he is a casual young man of whom you know nothing, and whom you could not meet without resort to deception, then I think you had better not encourage him to make your acquaintance.

Cynthia

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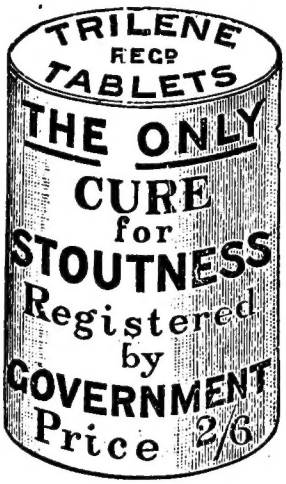

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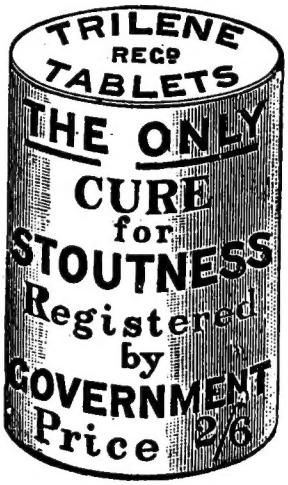

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1898.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

Miss CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18.b. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablet has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 12st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of 1st. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRÄD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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